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WOMEN AND THE FRENCH TRADITION

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Women and the French Tradition

Florence Leftwich Ravenel

New York
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TO THE MEMORY OF

MY FRIEND

WILLIAM GARROTT BROWN

WITHOUT WHOSE KIND ENCOURAGEMENT
AND WISE CRITICISM THESE ESSAYS
WOULD NEVER HAVE BEEN
ATTEMPTED.

F. L. R.

PREFACE

It is many years now since I owned to myself, with some surprise, that two subjects of study and observation were engrossing my attention more and more, and were proving each for its own sake—at least in that earlier time independent of one another—an unfailing source of interest and reward: and one of those subjects was Women and the other France.

I have cared for women, partly no doubt because I am one of them, and that *esprit de corps* which is only an expanded egotism, finds its account in emphasizing the importance of one's own kind. But partly also, I am sure, for a worthier reason. This has been called the woman's age and every hour she is solicited by new duties and responsibilities—fresh and sometimes unreasonable exactions and demands—to which her nature or her training make her unequal. On the other hand she is assailed and buffeted by the cynical taunts and reproaches of those who resent her growing freedom and intelligence—who would have her petty, frivolous and unworthy that they may continue to exploit her weakness. But in all this discordant tumult of praise and blame I have too often missed the low clear note of that justice which begins with under-

standing. Perhaps for me also there remains a word to say.

And there is France! In this hour of her revelation, when we see her at once crucified and transfigured before us, surely no expression of love and enthusiasm for France needs apology. From the strange ordered chaos of the battle field, her spirit rises undismayed to serene heights of spiritual interpretation, while still, with unhurried tread, clear vision and steady hand she goes about her unending, terrible, heroic task of saving the world.

The world's debt to France will not soon be paid. If now she is holding back the tide of barbarism from beyond the Rhine, has she not also, through all the Dark and Middle Ages, kept alive some sparks of the spirit of the Ancients? The Greek sense of form, lucidity of thought and intellectual courage become most easily intelligible to the modern mind through our knowledge of France.

But if mankind as a whole has so heavy a debt to the fusion of Latin and Celt which we find in France, woman in particular has her own special obligation to the people that have most loved and best understood her sex. And here my love of both finds its meeting-place—its full justification and reward. The French, and they only, have found time to consider the woman's nature and her needs, they have put her to the most heroic uses, have drawn strength from her weakness—in a word, with consummate skill, have woven her in elaborate or simple forms, in colours brilliant and

soft, into the great pattern of that fabric—ancient, beautiful and imperishable, which we call the French tradition.

FLORENCE LEFTWICH RAVENEL.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
PREFACE	vii
THE ETERNAL FEMININE	3
A WOMAN CRITIC OF WOMEN	39
A LAW UNTO HERSELF	64
THE GREAT SALONIÈRE	90
THE GREAT TRADITION	118
THE RIDDLE OF THE SPHINX	146
GREAT WOMEN'S DAUGHTERS	178
WOMEN OF FRANCE	207

ILLUSTRATIONS

	FACING PAGE
Mme. de Sévigné	*Frontispiece*
Maria Mancini	39
Christina of Sweden	52
George Sand	64
Mme. de Lafayette	146
Duchesse de Broglie	178

WOMEN AND THE FRENCH TRADITION

For permission to reprint five of these papers my thanks are due to the editors of the *North American Review*, where the essays on *Arvède Barine, George Sand, Mme. de Staël, Mme. de Sévigné* and *Great Women's Daughters* have appeared. The editor of the *Unpopular Review* also has kindly consented to the reprinting of *The Eternal Feminine.*

THE AUTHOR.

THE ETERNAL FEMININE

If she were not perennial and inexhaustible, we should have wearied of her long ago; for in spite of frequent admonitions upon classic authority as to "the proper study of mankind" we find man in his restricted sense generally neglected and ignored, while the wisest and wittiest, keenest and kindest tongues and pens, lavish their eloquence upon the eternal woman—for exhortation or satire, eulogy or abuse. And in this unanimous appreciation of her importance the modern woman is for once fully in accord with man.

It was indeed a fateful hour when Adam, his eyes rudely opened to a knowledge he had not sought, shut the Garden Gate behind him and stepped forth with Eve into the pathless "Wilderness of Sin." Thenceforth always this inseparable companion of his journeyings has been the most insoluble of all his enigmas—a mystery disconcerting, exasperating, alluring, precisely as the clue to her has been difficult to find. But no! surely I am wrong there, reading too much of modern sophistication into primitive minds. In those earliest times man did not think *about* woman at all, accepting her along with other natural phenomena as part of the great miracle of life—ascribing her strange alternations of mood, her apparently irreconcilable composite of simplicity and cunning,

wisdom and folly, courage and faintness of heart, to the same occult powers that had ordained the inexplicable but singularly stimulating succession of cold and heat, light and dark, sunshine and shower—to the gods, in a word, who in clothing her with mystery had endued her with a final and irresistible charm.

It scarcely needs to be added in this connection, that man's manifold efforts to explain woman—to reduce her to a system, to shut her into a code, with the rarest exceptions have done honour rather to his intentions than to his penetration. He has misread her nature and her instincts, misinterpreted her motives, misjudged her actions, with a uniformity inconceivable in a creature less honestly obtuse than himself. But till very modern times these mistakes of his have been of little moment even to the woman. Self-knowledge is perhaps the latest and slowest growth of the soul, little helped or hindered by forces working from without; primitive woman was not introspective and the thing that has really seemed important to her hitherto, is that man should be occupied with her—think about her as much as possible, whether he thought ill or well.

Her own interpreter she has never been—never at least until our own day—withheld in part, perhaps, by an imperfect mental equipment, in part also by a self-defensive instinct of secrecy and caution. Or it may be even, silenced and overborne by the generous egoism of man, who has willed so passionately, so persistently, so fatuously often, to

see the woman in the light of his hopes and fears, of his preconceived ideas of what she ought to be, and therefore, inevitably *was!* He has been so sure that he knew and understood—why should she deny and protest overmuch? Transfigured by the fire and force of his imagination, she has appeared to him sometimes under the form of Delilah or Vivien, sometimes, and on precisely the same evidence, wearing the halo of saints and angels, only, always strong where he knows himself to be weak, appealing and fragile where his own strength abounds. And so woman has kept silence, while all around her through the centuries, was growing up a legend, with precisely such measure of truth and error as it is the mark of legends to contain. She has not striven nor cried, nor lifted up her voice in the street against those who by turns flattered and traduced her. Instinctively she has known perhaps that this rainbow-tinted mist of illusion was at once a shelter and a disguise, beneath which her own nature could grow—her spirit awaken to full consciousness of itself.

But, if we may judge by signs and portents, woman's hour of Revelation at last has struck. As an entity distinct from man, a great collective idea, Woman has begun to come into her own. Freedom of speech and of movement is hers, all the education she can be persuaded to take, and above all, she holds that great modern weapon, the pen, firmly grasped in her hand. She is armed with the new sex-consciousness, the *esprit de corps* which accepts

as its axiom the fundamental antagonism between woman and man, and she enters upon her great campaign, not with the aim of civilizing the barbarian man, *that* she renounces as impossible—even if desirable, but with the declared intention of re-organizing, readjusting (if indeed she shall not see fit to destroy it) this rusty old social mechanism, to meet her newly recognized desires, ambitions and necessities. Such at least, so far as the lay mind can presume to interpret it, is the program of the Feminists.

The student of Feminism will be struck in the first place by the lack of anything approaching an original philosophic basis for its teaching. It is strictly and frankly imitative in its nature, and in every country takes colour with surprising facility from the national character and institutions. In America for example where the doctrine had its birth under the name of Woman's Rights, the movement has had to encounter a very marked indifference on the part of women in general to politics and to all public affairs, unless some great moral or humanitarian issue, like abolition or temperance, chance to be involved. Here, too, curiously enough those pioneer and early settler standards, which made of the few women obtainable something precious and apart, appear to have survived into a period of luxury and advanced material civilization and men still look upon their wives and daughters as *objets de luxe,* costly and charming but not meant to resist wear and tear. In the working class, no doubt, the harder conditions of life

enforce, even in this country, somewhat more of crude honesty and realism, but elsewhere the American women, relieved of all responsibility and of all participation in business affairs, have not on the whole justified the great expectations their unrivalled opportunities and their earlier promise had aroused.

The lethargy of this aristocracy of sex, this anomalous leisure class, has been the most formidable foe of Feminism in America. The prosperous woman, enjoying already unlimited indulgence and complete personal freedom, has had nothing to hope from change, and her unlucky or more ambitious sister has preferred, for the most part, to work out her individual emancipation, stimulated often by the generous patronage of the admiring male. An untoward environment this for feministic propaganda, and in it the woman movement made during one or two generations but a halting and uncertain progress, as one of a hundred *'isms*—the special fad and folly of disappointed spinsters, unhappy wives and incorrigible busybodies. The growing cosmopolitanism of our people and especially of the women is rapidly changing all that. For some years now Feminism has seemed to go forward by leaps and bounds, and as its best known representatives have been often women of distinguished gifts and the highest moral ideals, and have pursued uniformly methods of reason and moderation, their arguments have usually met with a respectful hearing even from their opponents, while it must still be said, I think, that their in-

fluence, great and increasing as it is, leaves the vast majority of men and women in this country quite untouched.

In England the situation is different. England is, *par excellence,* the man's country. The whole of its social life has been deliberately and ingeniously contrived, so as effectively to protect and foster his privileges, his pleasures, his vices. even, while the place reserved for the woman—her share of warmth and sunshine, may be not inaptly represented by the dark and stuffy little cage in the House of Commons, dignified with the name of the "Ladies' Gallery." Nevertheless in England the indirect power and influence of women, their use as lobbyists, campaign speakers and otherwise, has not been ignored by the politician, with the result that the leaders of militant Feminism in the recent violent outbreaks of their faction, have had the advantage of thorough acquaintance with the tricks of the trade. All those dreary political sophistries, canting professions, shallow apology and defence—they come back to us from the women's lips with the familiar ring of hypocrisy, egotism and self-deception, learned from the policies of men. We have heard and read their like so many times, and with a certain surprise and dismay, we ask ourselves if indeed these clever, determined, resourceful modern women can find no weapon more distinctive, subtle and characteristic than the stones that break the windows of London shops, or the chemicals that destroy in the post boxes the correspondence of school boys, shop girls and house-

maids; no more inspiring models for their imitation than the destructive labor riots which, from time to time, have discredited England in the eyes of the world.

And even when we recall the stupid and mediaeval injustice of some English laws, discriminating against women and giving perhaps some colour of excuse to the militant's ruthless and unintelligent revolt, our judgment is not reversed. We may explain, palliate perhaps, but never justify or tolerate defiance of law and order; still less yield or even give serious heed to arguments thus urged. For these feminists who set so high a valuation upon their manifold services to humanity through the ages, whose claim must always, in the last analysis, be the right of weakness against strength, of meekness against pride, of gentleness against brute force—by what strange warping of reason and logic have they brought themselves to take up the weapons of anarchy and violence, seeking to demonstrate by their fierce onslaughts on policemen and doorkeepers, by burning of ministers' houses and mutilation of works of art, that in them the forces of peace, civilization and morals find their surest bulwark and defence? Long ago the great English critic, speaking in the name of culture, pronounced the decisive word concerning those who break the law in the name of a higher right, a paramount good.

"And this opinion of the intolerableness of anarchy we can never forsake," wrote Matthew Arnold. "Because in a State in which law is

authoritative and sovereign—a firm settled course of public order is requisite, if man is to bring to maturity anything precious or lasting now, or to found anything precious or lasting for the future. . . . Thus in our eyes the very framework and exterior order of the State is sacred and culture is the most resolute enemy of anarchy, because of the great hopes and designs for the State which culture teaches us to nourish."

To us in America, Feminism has still the charm of novelty and we learn with a certain sense of chagrin that in several countries of Europe it is already distinctly out of date—settled, suppressed or incorporated into the program of some political party. With true Teutonic docility, the new woman of Germany has taken refuge under the wing of Socialism, with which the whole movement has a close spiritual affinity—at least in its developed forms; while in Russia most thorough-going feminists have probably transferred their activities to Siberian prison camps, or else made good their escape to more liberal lands. In Scandinavian countries, on the other hand, the new doctrine of sex has received its most cordial welcome, and its most elaborate exposition. These small, universally educated, highly civilized nations with their rationalistic protestantism, their indifference to tradition—born of too many national vicissitudes, have shown a disposition to try all sorts of experiments in the practical working of the new feministic creed, and a willingness to accept without wincing certain conclusions which might repel a more sensitive and

idealistic race. One is tempted to ask sometimes, whether their defective delicacy be the cause or the effect of the extreme freedom of action and discussion which they have so long enjoyed.

France, so long the nursery of new ideas, whence they are wont to emerge purged of their absurdities, pruned of their excrescences and grotesque extremes, and ready to fall into line in the great march of human progress! No wonder we look to her with especial interest, to see the form that Feminism has assumed, the defenders it has won on the French soil. As so often happens among those happily constituted Latin races, the French of both sexes are able to be interested in the feministic idea, without losing either heads or tempers. They know how to be serious without growing grim, satirical without bitterness and to pause at the precise moment when wittiness begins to degenerate into flippancy—argument into abuse.

It is safe to say that when a man of the eminence and dignity of M. Emile Faguet takes up his pen in defence of the movement (as he understands it) the lips of the mocker are unsealed at his own risk. Safe also to add that from a Frenchman only, with all the prestige of profound scholarship and admirable style, could such radical doctrine as his come with real impressive force; for after all, the nation which has produced in one hundred years a Mme. de Staël, a George Sand and an Arvède Barine, may surely maintain with some plausibility that its women are worthy a voice in determining its policies at home and abroad. In France, however, the

propaganda of Feminism if not less earnest, is certainly less noisy than across the Channel or across the Atlantic. I never heard of a feminist program at French elections and in all my visits to Paris, I have never had an opportunity to assist at a woman's street parade.

And yet—even M. Faguet! If I were a feminist I would not pin my faith to him, however thoroughgoing and consistent his advocacy of my cause may appear. In theory, his doctrine of the open door everywhere for women and men would carry us very far indeed; but on the other hand we dare not lose sight of the man himself. His immense tolerant scepticism confounding all women with all men in his half-pitying, half contemptuous indulgence, does not fail to suggest that the goal of equal opportunity to which he so impartially points them both, is not worth the strained muscle and labouring breath of her who would reach it. Without questioning his sincerity and good faith we must make large allowance for M. Faguet's love of irony and paradox, and there is grave doubt that the feministic sense of humour would be adequate to the interpretative process required.

"O yes," he exclaims, "men and women are indeed equal (with certain reservations) not because they are equally strong, but equally weak; not that one is as intelligent as the other, but that the minds of both are equally limited; not that they are equally virtuous, but equally depraved." I do not see the woman's Political Union affixing its signature to that article! Moreover the liberty M. Faguet

would grant to the woman in her choice of her vocation would be nullified in the feminist's eyes by the admonition with which he would couple it—that she make use of her freedom only in case of emergency—and we must indeed admit that such a restriction does seem to take back with one hand the treasure so liberally extended by the other. "Timeo Danaos," etc.

The feminists as we see have not as yet exterminated those chameleon qualities so long ascribed to woman, nor her—often invaluable—power of being all things to all men. And yet, however modified by national character or personal idiosyncrasy, Feminism in forms primitive, or highly organized, shows always certain identical marks, certain cardinal defects, which tend to vitiate and corrode its teaching and counteract those elements of strength and sanity, which lie, deep hidden, at the heart of the movement.

Most obvious to my mind among the fallacies of Feminism is the attitude of the new woman toward civilization—toward humanity's hard-won victories over the world of matter and force without and over the ravening wolves of brute instinct and appetite within. What hope has any doctrine in this modern world which finds its inspiration and its goal in the legendary, prehistoric past? How forlorn and dispiriting is that gospel which sees in each forward step in man's upward climb, freeing him from the blind terror of the unknown and from the exigencies of manual toil—in each conquest for man, a corresponding debasement in the posi-

tion of woman—the loss of some right, dignity or privilege which was hers in a primitive state! With homesick longing the feminists turn their eyes back to that golden age when the extreme simplicity of living, the besetting perils of the primitive race, obliged the man to associate his companion with all the bitter struggles and toils of his existence; when it was hers to mount guard over the camp, to sow the stony fields and reap the meagre harvest while he went forth to slay and pursue his foes or else chase the wild beasts, which in turn came back to her hands to be converted into food for his famished appetite or into garments for his chilled and wearied limbs. The elevation, the progressive emancipation of the man, has in the feminist's eyes entailed the growing degradation of woman, since his triumphs over nature have gradually removed her from a direct share in his difficulties, responsibilities and sufferings, have made her no longer his companion and helpmate, but rather the slave of his developing vices, the parasite and plaything of his growing luxury and greed.

Is this a true reading of history? I do not know. Even in fancy, I find it hard to transplant myself to "that dark backward and abysm of Time," and to share the thrills of the marvellous cave-woman, type and ideal of her sex who, we are bidden to believe, exulted in the toils and hardships of her lot, because forsooth, in confronting them she knew herself the equal of the man. But whatever her status, is it not a strangely perverse, sordid and poverty-stricken imagination which would seek, in

these modern times, the authentic basis of sex relationships in a mere community of physical toil? There is, it would seem, no lack of common ground upon which men and women can stand and labour side by side; but the feminist will admit but one kind—they must both plough the same field, both lift an equal load and tread with an equal stride the same stony path till the sun goes down. This golden age of the past seems to me more alluring than the apartment-house-and-co-operative-kitchen-stage, to which they aspire in the future, only inasmuch as the former condition has been proved to admit of change, while those who pass into this latter phase, may well be warned to leave hope behind—along with all other private possessions and individual distinctions. Were not the leaders of Feminism animated by a passion for equality that rises almost to monomania it would seem as if they, too, must be repelled by the unrelieved dreariness of the prospect they unfold.

But one object at least has been attained by this most ungracious theory. By maintaining that the man's gain is and has always been the woman's loss, the sexes are effectually arrayed the one against the other, and the campaign of sex antagonism is begun—woman as a class, we are told, has at last revolted against the age-long tyranny of man. The phrase sounds well, it strikes a bold aggressive note: yet it needs but a little reflection to suggest the reply that women do not and cannot constitute *a class*—they are the half of all classes, and so far as the inner springs and forces of Femi-

nism have revealed themselves by their works, they show it to be by no means a consistent and uniform body of doctrine, but rather a sort of general outlet or vehicle for the aspiration, energies, ambitions and discontents of women everywhere, who have, many of them, no other tie or interest in common. Hitherto we look in vain for the marks by which we know a great world-movement, a universal gospel, breaking down all barriers and unifying all classes in their resistance to a universal and intolerable evil.

The fundamental fallacy of Feminism, however, strikes deeper than this. Even if the various internal disputes and heresies of the movement were all adjusted and its followers could present a solid front to the world, they must still leave unanswered one momentous question—the only one that reaches the root of the matter. *Has* the woman been always, ever since the race rose to self-consciousness, only "undeveloped man," slowly and unevenly evolving, unfolding and girding herself for an irrepressible conflict? Upon our judgment of this our entire argument must rest, for if this be true, then the whole process and history of civilization is founded, as the new woman contends, upon shifting sands. All error, fallacy, injustice—the righting of which must involve the complete reorganization of society—a wrong inflicted by one-half of the race upon the other, so deep seated and irreparable that the only hope of redress—the one chance of rescue for the victim from parasitism and decadence, is to throw wide open the great arena of world conflict

and urge the woman to leap in—to stand or fall according to her strength and skill.

This summary of the feminists' position is by no means mere hyperbole or paradox. For the woman of the future to whom teachers and prophets look forward with such eager enthusiasm seems to me to be different from the woman of the past not only in degree but in kind. If it be possible to attain their goal—she will cast away the old loves and hates, the old ideals and standards as a garment outworn, that her new career may be unhampered—her race for equality unobstructed by any landmark or tradition of that old life with which she is resolved to have done once for all. She may claim whatever advantage lies in simplification. For interests and ambitions complex and manifold she will substitute henceforth one paramount and exclusive; she will plant her feet firmly in the footprints of man and follow him whereso-ever he may lead!

And would it be irrelevant to wonder, in passing, how far man is sensible—he the tyrant and oppressor—of all the incense unwillingly, perhaps unconsciously offered to his nostrils by this feminine campaign of imitation? It is, so far as appears, the woman's passionate singleminded desire and determination, to undo the work of the centuries—the old slow world-processes and world-history, and to remake herself in his image. His apparent blindness to the overwhelming tribute implied, accuses him no doubt, of almost incredible obtuseness, which is an ancient charge against his sex; but it

may also be offered as evidence of his modesty and good faith—qualities even more in need of defence in these dark days, than his intelligence. For when man has thought and dreamed and sung of woman, most worthily and well, his fancy has been fain to set her aloft in starry remoteness from his dusty conflicts, his humdrum struggles on the dead levels of every day. And now when he contemplates the new woman's pretensions and aspirations, any involuntary thrill of gratified vanity must be quickly suppressed by his growing sense of bewilderment and dismay. So far as he can see, she is asking not only equality, but a full *identity* of tastes, pursuits, pleasures and duties—claims which if granted would make her his competitor and rival in his own field. Nay, the extreme form of the doctrine goes further yet. The most systematic and consistent of the woman's new guides will not be content until the pressure of public opinion, if not of economic necessity—the still stronger urge of her own conscience shall have power to drive her out of the "parasitic" security of home into the world's labour market. By precept and example they will teach her to look upon her domestic interests and occupations—her home and her children, as an altogether insufficient vocation—one tending toward restricted views, diminished freedom of thought and action, and to be entered upon, if at all, temporarily, grudgingly, partially, as it were; the best of her talents and energies meanwhile to be preserved for some outside productive calling, to which, just so soon as the children shall be grown

up and out of the way, she may hope to devote her full time and ability.

This is the Paradise of the feministic aspiration! Perhaps it is not the fault of its creators that to the lay imagination of man or woman it should appear so arid and dreary a waste. "Give us labour and the training for labour" demands a famous Feminist, and we stand incredulous and amazed, that in a world like ours with the "little done, the undone vast," such a petition should issue with any urgency or deep sincerity from the hearts of the heavy-laden mothers of men. "Give us a task and a duty" is the concluding prayer of a great convention of new women: and we ask ourselves aghast, if humanity has indeed come to such a pass; if beauty and love and joy have quite vanished from the earth that even our desires should take no higher flight. Strange that the new Eden offered to mankind should have so little to recall the lovely lost garden of our dreams and so reek with the atmosphere of the stuffy apartment house, the day nurseries and damp or dusty legions of commuting men and women, undistinguished and undistinguishable in the common ugliness and monotony of their daily lives! And the reward they have to offer—these prophets of a new gospel—in exchange for all the treasures the woman must immolate in her progress —treasures of sentiment, tradition—illusions, too, if you will—is it indeed so glorious a prize? Their rhapsodies, their prophecies, their promises may all be reduced to the one bleak prospect—that woman shall one day be like man—shall perform

in a somewhat less efficient fashion the work that men do—shall be in effect a second rate man.

For that the woman shall ever do the really characteristic and distinctive work of men as well as men do it, is a pretension that needs only to be stated to prove itself absurd. Whether the proposal be to superimpose the man's work upon the woman's or, only, so far as possible to substitute his occupations for her own, the fundamental fact remains undisturbed; the absolute, inevitable mental and physical handicap of the woman is not less effective and controlling because it is ignored or obscured by rhetorical figures. During all the golden years of youth and early maturity—nay even to the confines of age, while the poet and the artist are embodying in imperishable forms the substance of their dreams; while the scholar in his library, the man of science in his laboratory unravel little thread by thread, through nights and days of unrelenting research and application, the mysteries of life and death—during all this period the woman —whether she choose the trodden path or elect to walk alone—is paying in a hundred obscure ways, the price of her immemorial lot as the mother of all living.

How indeed could it be otherwise? If Nature or Evolution through uncounted ages has been differentiating, adapting, refining upon its rudimentary processes, never for an instant losing sight of its great aim—the perpetuation of life—how can that half of the race, singled out and fashioned for the dangerous, difficult, supremely important func-

tion of motherhood, escape some counterbalancing limitation or deprivation, intellectual as well as physiological? Such a restriction would seem as well justified in theory as it is indisputable in experience and in fact.

And till the dawn of our restless, reforming age, the woman with rare exceptions has made no effort to deny or evade a disability carrying with it so many immunities and compensations. Here and there, it is true, thinly scattered across the centuries some woman has emerged, endowed for good or evil beyond her fellows—a poet like Sappho, a statesman and builder of empire like Elizabeth or Catherine, a warrior-saint like Joan of Arc or a seer of visions like Teresa de Ahumada. For each of these her place was found, her way was opened and her glory was won; but neither to them nor to their contemporaries did it occur to propose their special work, mission or achievements, as the rule of life, or the goal of ambition for their sisters—still less did they preach revolution in the old theories of woman's position.

Those days of peaceful certainty, of serene acquiescence are past. The decay of traditional theology, the spread of democracy on the one hand, of higher education and scientific research on the other, have pushed a new generation from its ancient strongholds; and no doubt it is well that men and women should awake to a keener desire, a new passion for the truth such as they have known in no other age. "It is good," they say, "to see things as they are just because they are so; and however

harsh its aspect and formidable its approach, truth is after all the only guide that can be trusted, not to desert us in the midst of the wilderness." We are far indeed, as yet, from any exact science of the vexed question of sex, from any infallible rule for measuring the quality or quantity of sex difference. There are many hypotheses to choose from, representing every shade of opinion—from that of the critics who see in woman a perpetual minor to the claims of her most ardent advocates, in whose eyes it appears merely a preventable accident that Shakespeare was not a woman. But between the supreme creative genius at one extreme and the incorrigible child-woman at the other—between Shakespeare and little Dora—there spreads a wide expanse peopled by all sorts and conditions of men and women of every mark and shade of intellectual endowment, and for these at least it should not be impossible to construct a theory of compromise.

In the long process of adaptation and differentiation—the slow moulding and shaping of the woman's flesh and spirit for the supreme office and function of motherhood, she appears to have lost according to biologists and psychologists,—or rather she has failed to develop to the highest degree, certain extremely specialized intellectual faculties and powers. Powers these are which are presupposed by the highest forms of scientific generalization, the rarest and loftiest exercises of the creative imagination; and in themselves they imply, very often, a loss of balance in their possessors, involving so severe a tension of body and brain, a strength spent

so unsparingly upon concentrated thought, solitary meditation or reckless adventure spiritual or material—as to be rarely compatible with the normal life of mankind.

How careful of the type is Nature, how careless of the individual life! To one man only among the multitude, is the great gift, the ultimate vision accorded, toward which whole generations have striven in vain; but, so far as history informs us, the great creative minds have hitherto belonged to men—Shakespeare and Michael Angelo, Beethoven and Dante, Newton and Pasteur—their feminine counterparts do not appear. All the theories and explanations which would ascribe their absence to lack of stimulus, to masculine oppression, to a servile tradition or any other external cause seem strangely to ignore some very pertinent facts. Daughters we know have always been disposed to inherit rather conspicuously the mental and physical traits of their fathers, yet their inheritance has always stopped short of the supreme gift; and as for the other plea—of education denied, of encouragement and opportunity stinted, we have only to open the lives of so many men of genius and read again the stories of poverty and ignorance, difficulties and oppression encountered and overcome by the very greatest of the sons of men, whether like Dante or Buonarotti, his lot were to stand before kings or only like the Scottish farmer's lad, to

> "Walk in glory and in joy,
> Following his plough along the mountain side."

Perhaps we have no truer measure of the essential quality of man and woman than their power to meet face to face a bitter truth like this? Yet I have heard it said that to those who do not turn from the encounter, there comes a spirit of high detachment, of fine penetration, which by far outweighs the pain of pricked bubbles and of lost illusions. Certainly the most original and distinguished (though not invariably the soundest) thinker produced by the feministic controversy does not shrink from the fullest and frankest concessions on this phase of the problem . . . "In the one hundred thousand years at least in which woman has practised the physical maternal functions, the spiritual attributes essential to motherhood have been so strongly developed by her that this has had and still has as its result a pronounced difference between the feminine and masculine soul." "Not till several generations of women have exercised their inventive and creative faculties can we really know whether the present inferiority of women is a provision of Nature or not—whether her genius was only hampered in its expression or whether, *as I believe*, it is ordinarily of a different kind from that of man . . . all human qualities lie latent in each but they have been so specialized by the division of labour, or on the other hand, so suppressed by it, that they now appear in varying proportion." So far Miss Ellen Key. But I have heard a woman, a good and eminent woman—protest that the being of a wise and beneficent God seemed to her irreconcilable with

a course of discrimination against one half the race, such as would be implied in Miss Key's conclusions!

So many questions fine and subtle and laying hold on the deepest issues of life, are raised by the theory of Feminism, that by their side the subject of the ballot, oftenest on the lips of the feminist-politician, seems to lay undue emphasis on the lower, more material aspects of the problem. If this were all, we might perhaps be tempted to leave the matter, as we leave so many others, to settle itself in the course of politics, trusting with characteristic optimism that the will of the people will by some mysterious alchemy turn out to be the will of God.

But if the vote be but the beginning of feministic agitation and aspiration—the weapon only of further aggression?— What then?

He must be very brave and very firm in his conviction, who would today plant himself in the path of this determined forward march, lifting his voice to warn the enthusiastic pilgrims, that the goal they now pursue may not in the event prove a Paradise Regained; affirming above the shouting and the tumult that the woman's traditional lot may be, not only good and desirable in itself, but also, for the great majority, the only lot which fully meets and satisfies the demands of their nature; holding out promises, rewards, incentives—different—oh, yes! why should she deny it?—but not less honourable, substantial, attractive than those which appeal to the man. Nay! this voice in the

wilderness might cry louder yet and claim in behalf of Nature, much belied—of those unconscious selective processes that have been moulding and fashioning the woman without her own consent, that they, too, are perhaps less ruthless and tyrannous than they may appear.

For in cutting her off from some few of the highest imaginative and intellectual achievements, Nature would seem to have left, as it were in compensation, all the woman's various powers, gifts and faculties more completely interfused, so that the typical woman, that finest and rarest of her kind whom poets have sung, artists painted and prophets foretold, is indeed a creature of a more perfect balance, more exquisitely poised and adjusted than the man of equal or superior gifts—mind and body, heart and brain would seem in her to be more harmoniously attuned, so that the immemorial conflict between the higher and the lower nature, the immortal Faust legend will for her haply lack always the note of tragic realism which it has for the man.

This more intimate union of flesh and spirit may, perhaps *must*, through the relative incapacity for detachment, for complete spiritual isolation, which it implies, make the highest creative activities unattainable, but may we not see in this very limitation a source of strength for humanity as a whole? Nature pursuing unhurried, undeterred, her single aim, imposes a check, lays a fetter ever so light upon the woman, mother of the race, and thus holds her (and the man with her) to the firm and whole-

some earth and safeguards, in ways incalculable, the sanity, health and happiness of the race.

And because of this more perfect balance of her powers the woman—the normal and typical woman—is, it would seem, in more stable equilibrium than the man; and thus, as has been often noted, in all organized social life, complex or primitive, she furnishes the principal element of conservatism, due not so much perhaps to a superior sense of reality, as to an intuitive dread of change. Her physical constitution is less hardy, her temper less aggressive than the man's and her nomadic taste and spirit of adventure must have been far more easily tamed and wonted to a settled existence. Her maternal feelings also, emerging from the region of instinct, must early have developed into an intelligent purpose to provide for her children the secure and stable environment essential to their welfare. Of course she did not then—and luckily, for the most part, does not now subject her impulse to rigid analysis. The division of labour which more and more definitely assigned her to the camp and the children, while the man went forth to the battle or to the hunting field, and took from her slenderer hands the harrow and the scythe, was in all likelihood accomplished as silently as the progress of the seasons. The feminist speaks of the enslavement and degradation of the sex; but let us remember that "sex warfare" is a modern invention and that unless man and woman throughout the ages had lived together in tolerable amity—civilization—nay, life itself, would have been

impossible upon the earth. And why, since we, like the feminists, are left largely to inference and conjecture in this matter,—why should we not rather believe that the woman let fall the heavier, rougher implements of war and agriculture with a relief directly in proportion to her intelligence, that she might build up a kingdom of her own—a strong if humble house of life destined after all to outlive the armaments, empires, and fortresses upon which her adventurous mate has wasted so much of his imagination and force?

O, yes, we are learning now to deny and despise its elemental pains and pleasures, but—let us hasten to affirm it while still it is true—from the walls of home radiate for ever a light and warmth and sweetness that reach far beyond its own narrow bounds ministering to the great ends for which civilization exists—for promoting human happiness—for creating and preserving a source of "joy in widest commonalty spread." And without this ministry the sacred fire in the heart of mankind which kindles all great thought, all noble endeavour, all heroic sacrifice, would but too surely go out. In its beginning doubtless this little sanctuary was thought of primarily as a place of safety for the woman and her children, shelter from cold and heat, from onslaughts of savage tribes of man or beast, from the arrow that flyeth by day and the pestilence that walketh in darkness; and we may well believe that its existence furnished to primitive man as it has to his descendants, an incentive to

effort, self-denial and humanity, compared with which the woman's presence beside him on the battlefield would have been weakness indeed. For this woman, this creature of a limited horizon, of definite small hopes, ambitions and desires, of manifold little gifts and faculties, has carried with her always not only the hope of the race, the promise of the future, but the secret of joy, the source of happiness and reward, and without her the man's magnificent if one-sided achievements, his limitless aspirations, his infinite capacity for endurance would yet leave him a forlorn and homeless wanderer upon the earth he has himself subdued.

And the progress of the ages, pushing back the horizon line of man and woman, enlarging their capacities for knowledge and usefulness and enjoyment, has not, I maintain, changed essentially their respective rôles. The woman's channels of service and achievement have grown larger a hundred fold, but I appeal from theory to observation and experience! Wherever women have risen appreciably above the level of mediocrity in any vocation or pursuit, it has been (with exceptions so few as to be negligible) in the exercise of her distinctively feminine powers—expanded, ennobled, transfigured sometimes, but still recognizably hers —powers of flexibility and adaptation, of keen observation and nice handling of details, as also of intuitive comprehension of others, of disinterested sympathy with them and of generous self-devotion to objects and causes not her own. She is still, in a

hundred senses more or less sublimated and enlarged, the mother, the home-maker and keeper, the joy-bringer of the race.

It is a curious circumstance and one not without significance perhaps, that the Anglo-Saxon culture, so favourable to the development of individual initiative and political freedom among men, has had hitherto results less satisfactory in its handling of women. It must be granted that the Teuton, be he Saxon or Prussian, has had always a heavy hand and that some things as precious as fragile too often crumble in his grasp. At all events, it would appear in the light of history, that the so-called Latin race and in particular the French branch of it, who have sometimes loved woman not wisely but too well and fostered in her those very faults to which her own nature is most prone, have nevertheless best understood the woman's nature and best known how to develop and utilize her genius for her own advantage and the good of the world.

The modern French people, inheritors in a modified form of the Latin love of order, symmetry and proportion, have applied these qualities to the common and casual contacts and associations of every day intercourse. They are past masters in the handling of the lighter side of life. By an almost unbroken tradition they belong to a civilization older than their own national consciousness and if their long experience has cost them some facile optimism, some transparent illusions, some unreasonable pretensions, they yet owe to this their

delicate touch, sure taste and sense of measure, as well as a certain openness of mind and susceptibility to ideas. To them society means not only a channel of agreeable and humanizing intercourse among men, in their hours of leisure, but still more —a powerful agent of general education—of illuminating thought, and directing opinion, as well as of refining manners and maintaining a standard of decorum.

The position of women in France has been always no doubt much more powerful and influential than is at all apparent to the foreigner. In the Latin code the family is the irreducible unit of civilization and the reverential attitude toward the Mother as in very deed the corner stone of the house is an inference too obvious to be discussed. It is impossible to read French literature or associate with French people without being continually impressed by the mother's authority, the daughter's influence, the wife's prestige in the thoughts and lives of the men of the nation. The far famed institution of the Salon then, with its apotheosis of woman as the social arbiter, was a more natural development—a less revolutionary innovation than might be supposed. The great Frenchmen of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had early learned to take account of their women, favourably or otherwise, and the Gallic genius, already more sophisticated and worldly-wise than any other in Europe, with its mixture of wit and vanity, of sentiment and sensuality, its love of ideas, chastened by its exacting sense of form, found the contributions

of women to social evolution too precious to be foregone.

From the day in the early years of the seventeenth century, when Mme. de Rambouillet, looking around on the comfortless interior of her Paris Hotel—stately, conventional, unhomelike—put her clever wits at work to contrive an arrangement which by setting her guests physically at their ease would invite and dispose to conversation; ever since, in particular, her famous *chambre bleue* emerged with its sky-coloured hangings, flower bedecked tables and luxurious chairs—the triumph of her skill as hostess and as domestic architect, the woman's kingdom in France, began to enlarge its boundaries and make good new prerogatives. With Mme. de Rambouillet begins the great tradition of famous French women of letters who were also women of the world—a series scarcely interrupted for two hundred years.

To the Frenchwomen of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries of the upper and even of the upper middle class, this school of the salon was a veritable higher education. Here, those distinctive gifts of hers—neither purely intellectual nor purely physical, but as it were hovering on the border and dependent for their evocation upon a certain harmony and interplay of flesh and spirit—here these delicate and evanescent things were prized and fostered as nowhere else. And, on the other hand, the severe moral system of a Pascal or a Nicole, the majestic eloquence of Bossuet, the irony of La Bruyère, the aristocratic cynicism of la Rochefou-

cauld were interpreted by the authors themselves or their disciples and the women's lighter, softer, more unstable spirits were disciplined and fortified by contact with the highest, austerest thought of the age.

And she was by no means a merely passive guest at the great banquet, nor were the benefits of this stimulating intercourse exclusively on her side. Of all her womanly graces—her sweetness, sympathy and charm, she gave abundantly, as well as of her unselfish loyalty and disinterested enthusiasm, and who that has read Mme. de Sévigné can fail to see how great a part was played by her and her scarcely less gifted friends in *humanizing* and, so to speak, socializing the great thoughts of their masculine teachers and guides?

The woman's roots struck deep into this rich and varied soil and she was free instinctively to take what was hers and reject the rest; and here, without pressure, without grinding competition or unnatural concentration, some of the rarest and most precious qualities of the feminine mind reached their most complete development and most perfect expression. It may be a hard saying, but I believe it is true nevertheless, that the burden of long continued unrelenting investigation and research, and the spiritual solitude that such intense application implies, too often leave the woman's brain exhausted, her real originality blunted and blurred beneath the load of alien substance. Or in those rare instances where an exceptionally vigorous intellect does resist, does flourish even under

the discipline of highly specialized and exacting studies, how often is it that the body rebels, paying the penalty of a balance disturbed, and we see a brilliant intelligence, a profound scholarship, a luminous spirit handicapped—if not warped and perverted—by the too fragile physical organism by which they are controlled. All the children of men need, no doubt, a certain share of sunshine and freedom to insure their growth and wellbeing; but it would appear that the man with his hardier constitution of mind and body can forego the fostering light and warmth with better prospect of impunity than the woman.

It has been affirmed sometimes, by those who deprecate the moral effect of a sophisticated and highly complex social life, such as that which flourished in France in the great days of the Monarchy, that woman has been always and only what the man's standards required her to be, and in a sense that is true and inevitable, whether she elect to antagonize him by imitating and competing with him on his own ground, or to flatter him by a studied conformity to his tastes and desires. It is the man always who determines the goal of her efforts. But in the early period, and in the best and most typical society of France, the moral plane on which those representative women lived was still, all things considered, relatively high, the balance and healthful versatility of their powers still fairly maintained, and even their faults and frailties were touched with a certain simple and naïve humanity, that wins our pity if not our pardon. It was not until a

later and more corrupt period that this love of ideas, of society in its highest sense begins to dissolve, under our very eyes, into less worthy passions—to transform itself into personal rivalries, jealousies and competitions, unheard of in an earlier time and explicable only when we recognize how the men of the day encouraged and fomented for their own interests the women's ambitions and discords. Famous Frenchmen have acknowledged obligations inestimable to the salons and their hostesses, have expressed gratitude for all sorts of favours, ranging from the loan of money in time of stringency to the launching of a literary masterpiece or a successful campaign for election to the French Academy. And it is certain that to these women the French civilization of that brilliant time owes much of its unique character, the French intellectual life its astonishing vividness and charm and its international prestige. The real difficulty, becoming increasingly apparent as time elapsed, lay in the very uncertain and usually meagre rewards which fell to the lot of the great *salonières*. Did they find it, in the long run, entirely worth while? Their lives were absorbed, their fortunes exhausted, their family life destroyed in the service of their famous but fickle friends, and the intense emotional and intellectual excitement in which most of them lived, must have been an atmosphere far from salubrious to body and mind.

A more powerful solvent of beliefs, traditions, prejudices, can scarcely be conceived than this keen, sharp, dry atmosphere of France in the

eighteenth century—the France of Voltaire, Dalembert, Diderot—and curiously enough, the man's mind, through his greater power of detachment, his greater diversity of interests also, no doubt, seems better able to resist such forces of disintegration than the woman's. With her, when the balance is lost, when the intellectual and esthetic interest has once for all overborne and smothered the moral and spiritual, there seems little left save a mood of hard scepticism and reckless bitterness, bearing fruit only in desperation and decadence. We may accept Mme. du Deffand, the friend and incomparable correspondent of Horace Walpole, as at once the finest, most typical and melancholy example of the mistress of a salon in the later period, while Mme. de Staël, coming almost at the end of the series, seems to gather up all the great qualities of her kind, as well as their weaknesses and defects.

But in Mme. de Staël the fire of a very real genius, a strong vitality and ardent and generous temperament, combined to lift her out of the ranks even of her distinguished countrywomen and to make of her a sort of type and incarnation of French social life. True it is she left no immortal masterpieces except the memory of herself, and the rich harvest of subtle suggestions, noble emotions and intuitive wisdom, scattered broadcast over her printed books and recorded conversations, has served, by the way, quite as much to make the literary fortunes of lesser men and women as to enhance her own. She lives far more by what she

was than by what she wrote, her personality was far greater and more interesting than her achievement. Her mobile, susceptible nature took the imprint of all the marvellous passing show and the flashes of inspiration which she emits seem sparks struck out by the impact of men and movements around her rather than results of deliberate reflexion or the formulæ of a consistent political and philosophic creed.

This is the characteristic note of that power of personality—an impulse toward spontaneous, intelligent self-development and self-expression; and to this I look for most of the woman's conquests in the future as I find in it the source of her durable achievements in the past.

The man, if he is to do his work with efficiency, must go down fully armed to the battle, where forces beyond his control turn and drive him, not whither he would, but whither he *must* go. The hard unrelenting struggle for life, so necessary, often so noble in motive and purpose, leaves him little time or strength for the cultivation of the inner life—for the conscious, deliberate fostering of those finer perceptions, delicate intuitions and sympathies and divinations which are the flower of human life, the spring of human joy. While by reason of elemental conditions not of her making and in spite of ancient wrongs, of injustice yet unrighted, it is to the woman far more than to the man that the boon of inward freedom, this little kingdom of the spirit, still belongs.

Perennial she is and inexhaustible and—with

apologies to Vergil—essentially unchanged and unchangeable. The pressure of a commercial age seems now to be warping and narrowing men's souls and diverting into lower channels the interest and solicitude they once, in happier times and lands, devoted to the woman and her social realm. The Salons are as much beyond our reach today, we are told, as the Parthenon or the Rheims cathedral. And checked in her normal expansion the modern educated woman lapses into frivolous luxury or breaks out into those extravagant fads and hobbies that bring her notoriety rather than fame. Some of the noblest seek in philanthropy an imperfect compensation for their poverty-stricken personal lives.

But the change is on the surface—is in conditions chiefly. Now as always the woman's nature, the urge of her deepest desires, drives her toward the development and enrichment of her individual life—and the liberation of the spirit that goes with it. If she will but live by the law of her nature and not in defiance of it, her gifts shall come, I believe, to their fullest and most fruitful exercise. The salt of her humour, the fire of her passion, the savour of her sacrifice shall no whit of it be lost, but passing little by little into the hearts of her children and of those who touch her as she goes on her way, shall return at last into the very fibre of her own soul and in time be recognized as the most priceless of humanity's spiritual treasures.

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MARIA MANCINI
From the portrait by Mignard.

A WOMAN CRITIC OF WOMEN

ARVÈDE BARINE

To those of us to whom the word of Matthew Arnold is still law, the silence that begins to fall around the great schoolmaster's name is of evil omen. Perhaps indeed it is his name only that we miss. It may be that the truths which came from him with almost the force and novelty of a revelation have become today a part of our common heritage of knowledge. His phrases, his tricks of expression, still rise to our lips unbidden like the words of Scripture, and with every intention of being original, we are often thinking his thoughts after him in entire good faith.

One service which he rendered to us in America is likely to grow in importance as each passing year confirms the rightness of his judgment. With mild but steady insistence he urged us to look to France rather than to Germany for intellectual guidance and inspiration. There was a time when we were dazzled and allured by the range and apparent profundity of German learning. Our own scholarship was still crude and our educational reformers failed to perceive that obscurity does by no means always imply depth, nor clearness and elegance mean superficiality. Several decades were needed and much waste of time, money and enthusiasm to

demonstrate how mechanical the German method of extreme specialization and so-called original research may become in unskilled hands—whether at home or in Germany.

It was well then that we should turn our eyes to the land of Bossuet and of Molière, to the faults of whose chief spirits we of English race are little prone, while their intellectual virtues are for us the most needful and the hardest to attain. Whether we knew it or not, Arnold's praises of France, his polite and measured depreciation of German ideals, found their way to our half-reluctant brains, and slowly but surely had their effect. After all, to have so saturated the choicest minds of two generations with his tastes and opinions, is perhaps glory enough for any man.

If then it seems overbold to invoke this great name in introducing a French critic little known in America, I must plead in excuse the subtle and pervasive influence of Arnold himself, which associates him inevitably with certain characteristic traits of the French genius. A Frenchwoman who has attained a European point of view more completely than any—I had almost said Frenchman—since the days of Mme. de Staël; a Protestant speaking with judicial detachment to a Catholic world; a woman writing chiefly to and about women and reiterating in many tones the things women like least to hear and would be most grateful to be allowed to forget—it is not without reason that we may claim for Arvède Barine some of those qualities which the great Englishman most esteemed in

her people, combined with others rare in any age or country.

Mme. Barine has written criticism, biography, memoirs, covering an extraordinary range of subjects, times and people, but she is not primarily a literary critic—she is a moralist, an interpreter, a painter of portraits in words. Like Ste.-Beuve she is interested in a man's work chiefly because it is one of the paths by which she reaches his soul. The conditions and circumstances that have moulded him, the heredity which, more or less obscurely, has modified his genius, the moral crises that have at once revealed and determined his character—these are to her supremely worth while. Behind the artist, the soldier, the saint, the coquette, she is seeking the man and woman; and the vividness of the life which she evokes from faded canvas and yellowing parchment is as unexpected as it is delightful.

This gift of life is, I suppose, among the final tests by which we know the higher or creative forms of art. The great heroines of poetry and fiction for example are of our own race and kindred, though of larger growth and nobler mould. Tess Durbyfield, Sandra Belloni, Pompilia, are at least as much alive as ourselves, who are swept away irresistibly, gladly into the stronger fuller current of their life.

How strange—how sad even that it should so often fare otherwise with the great men and women of history! It would seem almost as if the authentic chronicling of the dates of their birth and

death had made them seem more really dead than as if they had never lived at all. How then is it possible, after so many years and so many volumes, that we should still follow with a passion of pity and suspense the lonely figure of Jane Welsh Carlyle? Or that the uncomforted deathbed of Goethe's mother should so clutch at our heart-strings? Or that, against the background of our comfortable mediocrity, Teresa de Ahumada should suddenly stand forth, a heroine to be likened only to Juliet or Desdemona—to be wept over and worshipped with an enthusiasm that defies the centuries? The power to set flowing afresh the springs of old feelings long staunched by familiarity and habit—this secret implies surely no ordinary imaginative gifts in its possessor and sets her quite apart from the conventional writer of memoirs and monographs.

And it is not only the individual man or woman that Mme. Barine calls back to life. There is a little essay of hers on one of the old Spanish Rogue Romances, *Lazarillo de Tormes*, which to my mind, diffuses more of the atmosphere and spirit of old Spain than many painful volumes of history or research. And there is another—a review of the memoirs of a certain transplanted Arabian princess which conveys us, our western nerves aquiver, to the heart of an African harem, so that, for the moment, we share with most uncomfortable acuteness the life and sensations of its inmates.

Mme. Barine's subjects are by no means re-

stricted to women. Her biography of Alfred de Musset bids fair to become the classic life—or at least the classic *short* life of the poet. She has written also a life of St. Francis of Assisi, and one of Bernardin de St. Pierre, but there is no question that she is interested chiefly in women and from her hands we have a memorable gallery of feminine forms and faces.

In the collection of essays entitled, *Princesses* and *Great Ladies*, we have the story of some of those royal or semiroyal ladies who have from time to time filled the eye of Europe by right of rank and birth, of talent or ambition, or perhaps only of exceptional perversity or conspicuous misfortune. They are indeed a lamentable group—these princely ladies—though it was their good luck to live in an age and in a civilization where vice and folly were still sometimes picturesque.

The study of Christina of Sweden leads us into the company of authentic kings and queens. It is one of the most striking and by the same token the most depressing of these essays—for those at least who still wish to think well of their fellowmen. The very difficulties of Christina's position, as the daughter of the Warrior-Saint Gustavus Adolphus, and ruler of a semi-barbarous but wholly loyal and devoted people, must have called out the highest powers of any noble nature. The record of her grotesque failure—of her wilful betrayal of her admiring subjects,—her gross misuse of her royal power and of her natural gifts, fills some of the

darkest, saddest pages in modern history, and they are not the less sad for being at times exquisitely absurd.

"This nation of illiterates was consumed with a faith never equalled even in our day, in the supernatural powers and virtues of education. For ten long years Sweden fairly held its breath as it watched each stage of its Sovereign's progress in Latin composition and mathematics. The Queen was beginning Greek; oh! what tidings of great joy! She was reading Thucydides; the country was spellbound; and when foreigners began to speak of the child as an infant prodigy, it was esteemed cause for National thanksgiving."

But the evil inclinations, fostered by too much power, too much freedom and adulation, seemed to triumph wholly in this ill-starred soul. The very ideal of the nation which sought to make of her both king and queen, both man and woman, served to warp her nature past all straightening, and encouraged cravings and ambitions as abnormal and vicious as they were impossible of accomplishment. And now, writes her biographer:

"Neither her talents nor her superior intelligence, her learning nor her courage, can save her from a terrible verdict. She is outside the pale of humanity, being neither sane nor responsible; her misshapen body contained a perverted soul, not discerning good and evil. The brilliant Christina, who was almost a genius, was also a moral monster."

The same volume contains a series of French

portraits, varying in scope and importance, and dealing with certain heroines of the reign of Louis XIV. The story of Maria Mancini, niece of Cardinal Mazarin, is not only an enthralling tale of intrigue and pseudo-romance, but it is also a vignette of the French Court during the early years of the great reign. The king's passion for this brilliant, degenerate, strangely seductive young Italian was a flame that set fire, not only to his heart, but to his slow, retentive intelligence—"She made him ashamed of the creature he was—without ambition, without aspirations either good or evil; with desires that took no higher flight than the choice of a costume or of a *pas de ballet.*" She made him mindful, in short, that he was a king, and that it was in his power to become a great king. This was a lesson he never forgot and which continued to bear fruit, we may add, long after the Mancini, foiled of her hopes, had transferred her fascinations to other fields. She sowed the seeds of that incredible self-confidence which was to become the religion of Louis XIV and to animate him in his long and finally relentless struggle with the old nobility of France.

All the phases and vicissitudes of that long warfare are unrolled in the two volumes which Arvède Barine devotes to Mlle. de Montpensier. The frank, arrogant, dashing, yet essentially vain and childish character of *la Grande Mademoiselle* is an excellent type of the gallant old order to which she belonged, while the systematic degradation and abasement which that order suffered at the hands of the

king are well illustrated in her history. Poor Mademoiselle! The success of the system was less complete with her than with most of the others. To the very end she was a poor courtier and a singularly exposed and defenceless woman.

The volume entitled *Portraits de Femmes*, consisting of essays written and published at different times, contains, in my judgment, Mme. Barine's choicest work as an essayist, her most penetrating criticism of life. A woman's delicate intuitions, a woman's power of sympathetic understanding, are pre-eminently hers, and yet her ready sympathies are controlled by a trained analytical judgment and by the most upright, the most uncompromising moral sense. Here there is no splendour of royal robes to dazzle our eyes, no etiquette of court or castle to divide and weaken the human interest; we are brought face to face, in the close contact of daily living, with several of the most eminent and distinguished women of modern times, and through these pages they live and move in all the changefulness and complexity of nature itself. The mist of legend, the cant of conventional biography, are swept aside; a hand as unsparing as the surgeon's, though with the artist's formative touch, lays bare the secret springs from which flow all the main currents of their life and action.

The impression which remains with us after reading these records is one of sadness—sadness that is not accidental and transitory, but inherent in the very nature of things. Perhaps, indeed, any human document, in proportion as it is true and

vividly set forth, must make somewhat melancholy reading. Perhaps we have the right to demand only that the tragedy be not unrelieved, that a streak of misty sunshine fall sometimes aslant from the stormy sky. At least we would be assured that the storm and stress of the conflict, the burden and heat of the day's toil, were not borne in vain; for if those who stand in the forefront of the battle have left no word of cheer or encouragement, what hope can there be for us of the rank and file?

And it is precisely because of her buoyancy, her unconquerable spirit of faith, love and joy, that the figure of St. Teresa and her story, however often we hear it, remain among the most inspiring, uplifting, and at the same time profoundly moving in all history. Hers was a life of incredible labours, difficulties, hardships, and austerity; but all along her way there sprang up the rare and perfect flower of heart's-ease. Indeed, it is the salt of her delicious humour, her unfailing good sense, native wit, and energetic cheerfulness which make her intelligible to us who are not saints and mystics and to whom her trances and ecstasies, visions and ravishments, are for ever a sealed book in a language to which we have no key.

And her achievements—how far more marvellous are they than any miracle claimed for her by the Church! Not only did she reform her own order, but she set in motion forces which finally revolutionized conventual life throughout Catholic Christendom. Perhaps only one of Latin race could today look back with so much indulgence and sym-

pathy and so little repugnance as Mme. Barine does upon the manners of Spain and Italy three centuries ago. Certainly only one who had come to know and love it well could evoke for us, in all its wildness and harshness, that Spain where Don Quixote was but an average citizen, where the fierce and violent scenes of Lope de Vega's plays could enact themselves unreproved within the city walls, and even the convents were hotbeds of adventure and intrigue. This cruel, romantic, devout, bloodthirsty Spain, which was clamouring for bread at the very hour when all the riches of the western world were being emptied on her shores—this is, indeed, a background against which the form of Teresa de Ahumada stands out in bold relief. This was the stage for heroism and for madness, where the mere fact that a belief was absurd was no bar to accepting it, and that an action was impossible was no reason against attempting it. This wonderful life had a fit setting. And out of it all, the ordeal of success so much more crucial than the ordeal of failure, she came unscathed.

"We see her grown old, exhausted, dying. What is left now of the fascinating Teresa de Ahumada? On the surface, nothing, only a little old woman with a wrinkled face, one arm useless, bent double with aches and pains, partially paralysed, feverish, forlorn, piteous. Only her fine dark eyes still speak of her past triumphs. Looking deeper, there is everything; a creature intensely alive, lovable, exquisite; a heart of flame who would have been Dyonisa, that Spanish Juliet, if she had not been a

saint; . . . and she is a woman of genius withal, with serious and lofty ideas, and a bearing of incomparable dignity. The restless, capricious recluse of earlier years has become one of the great figures of the Catholic world. Taking her all in all, a being of rare perfection, saved from eccentricity, that snare of exceptional natures, by the most perfect good sense that ever dwelt in human brain.

"We may reject her opinions, smile at her candid faith and at her familiarities with the Almighty; we may even deprecate her influence over young and untried spirits. One thing is certain: we cannot live in intimate contact with this woman, even after three hundred years, without yielding to the power of that charm which subdued her contemporaries to her will and gave her the strength to remove mountains. And the secret of this spell is not far to seek. Saint Teresa was *alive* as no one is alive any more in our day, as few were, even in a time of abounding life like the sixteenth century.

"She never experienced that indifference which disintegrates. She could not endure melancholy, the inner root of weakness; she eschewed cowards and those whose only resource was tears. Courage was what she demanded of every man, and that he should not desert in the face of his destiny. She believed, willed, acted, and never did her heart prompt or her lips utter the questions, 'Is it worth while?' or 'What is the use?' "

But it was to her own Order of Carmel that she bequeathed her most precious gift—an inspired legacy of faith, hope, and love stronger than death.

"Every evening, from ten to eleven o'clock, throughout the whole extent of the Christian world, the Carmelite nun is at prayer. Her prayer is not for herself, any more than her smarting shoulders or the gnawing pangs of hunger that are always with her. The prioress has just been telling her, as she does each evening, that the Carmelite who is bent upon her own soul's salvation is a Carmelite unworthy of the name. She is there to pray, not for herself, but for others. She has heard, too, that this is the hour when the powers of evil are mustering in the world, and, since she entered the cloister young and ignorant, these words awaken only vague images of mystery and terror. She prays, and in her waking dreams the great army of sin seems stealthily to invade the dark world. The throng grows greater; soon it will cover the earth. But no! right across the path of its advance there lies a group of prostrate forms. They are only poor, feeble women clothed in sackcloth, but before them the dark army retreats for a moment, and here and there some soul is saved that would otherwise have been lost. The Carmelite bears with her to her cell the vision of her victory, and falls asleep in peace; and this splendid gleam of poetry she owes to St. Teresa, who believed that in the hope of expiating the sins of others was abundant recompense for any sacrifice."

It is indeed a far cry from St. Teresa to Jane Carlyle; and yet, far apart as they are in time, race, religion, and destiny, there is, perhaps, an inner kinship that goes deeper than all superficial

divergence. At least we must admit that, among all Arvède Barine's heroines, there are none for whom her touch is so tender and delicate, her tone so reverent, as for these two. Like St. Teresa, Jane Carlyle lived, toiled, suffered, and died for an ideal—for an object, from her point of view at least, supremely worthy. She looked at life with steady eyes, and her dislike of exaggeration and extravagance was quite as strong as that of her Spanish forerunner. If I did not fear to fall into the very extreme she so hated, I would affirm that the Holy Office even in Spain never devised (for saint or sinner) a martyrdom more exquisitely excruciating than the life of Jane Carlyle. Certainly St. Teresa's path was rose-strewn compared with that of this brilliant, gifted Scotchwoman, wife of one of the rarest spirits of the nineteenth century. Genius apart, the difference between these two women was chiefly a matter of religion. Teresa de Ahumada was upborne always by the sense of a divine strength reinforcing her own. Heavenly voices spoke to her in her visions, and she confidently looked forward to finding at the close of her long and toilsome journey a "rest that remaineth" in a "City that hath foundations whose builder and maker is God." For Jane Carlyle there was nothing of all this; she had pinned her faith, had centred all her hopes, aspirations, and affections, upon the most unstable of all God's creatures—a man of genius.

It would be useless to tell again to readers of English the story of the married life of the Car-

lyles, though to the eyes of a Frenchwoman some things are plain and obvious which have hitherto been doubted or denied. One fact is certainly established. Whatever may have been Jane Welsh's sentiments at the time of her marriage, Jane Carlyle was later on deeply, incurably, hopelessly in love with her strange, uncanny husband. No other motive, according to Mme. Barine, would account for her voluntary self-immolation through so many dreary years. Of Carlyle, too, this French picture is enlightening. It is drawn not without sympathy and appreciation; on the contrary, no harsh feature is emphasized and all honour is done to his splendid gift, his noble ideals, his stainless integrity of heart and life; due weight is attached also to his very sincere wretchedness; but, after all, the portrait is forbidding enough. "No tenderness," says a friend of Mrs. Carlyle, "no caresses nor affectionate words—nothing for the heart. A glacier on a mountain would have been about as human a companion." He might have taken as his motto the famous line of Terence slightly modified for his purpose: "I am a man, and all things human are foreign to me."

With her characteristic mingling of insight and irony, humour and severity, Arvède Barine does not fail to point the moral of the piteous tale.

"Great men are the most difficult to transform, precisely because they are made of a different clay, finer and less pliable than the common run of humanity. Therefore, with no intention of discouraging any woman who may aspire to marry a man of genius, it is perhaps

QUEEN CHRISTINA OF SWEDEN
From the portrait at Versailles.

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expedient to explain to her that what these choice spirits have to offer in return for all they have a right to demand has no sort of connection with what is commonly meant by the word happiness. The satisfaction which a Mrs. Carlyle or a Lady Byron may expect is of a different nature—loftier, it may be, in the eyes of a few, less agreeable surely to the taste of the majority. The woman who makes choice of this lot should do so with eyes wide open, and provided always that her calling and election are perfectly sure."

Toward George Eliot, Arvède Barine takes a different tone. There is indeed a hint of dryness—I had almost said of grimness—in her treatment of our great novelist from beginning to end. George Eliot was a person who took herself and all that pertained to her with the utmost seriousness and reserved her humour strictly for the personages of her stories; and to the French mind, with its unfailing sense of measure and capacity for detachment and self-ridicule, the English woman's lack of simplicity and geniality is a serious blemish both in the woman and in the writer.

But Mary Ann Evans' relations with George Henry Lewes must be always the central fact in her otherwise colourless life, and her critic's treatment of her in this decisive episode must more or less determine his attitude toward her as a woman and as a moralist before and after. And here, by a strange irony, the voice of her French critic rings out clear and true in defence of the old ideals.

"She might have told herself that the happiness of the individual should be subordinated to the law upon

which hangs the welfare of all, and that, as has been finely said, 'It is unworthy of great spirits to spread abroad their own trouble and unrest'; but she never thought of this. Genius is selfish; it wills to live, and, finding itself cramped in the moulds made by society for the mass of average men and women, it breaks its bonds."

Judged by its immediate results, her course does not confirm the famous doctrine upon which her ethical system is based. More fortunate than her Tito or her Gwendolen, the consequences of her action did not pursue and drag her down. George Eliot won happiness with Lewes as she won glory, and, after a while, friendship, esteem, and popularity. What is still more remarkable from the point of view of the psychologist, "her character did not deteriorate—the usual result of wrong-doing and its surest punishment. Her soul gained steadily in purity and strength—a very strong proof (since the divine gift of remorse was denied her) that her conscience was really at peace.

"But for her too must come the judgment. It flashed upon her sight when the hour of glory struck —a glory so undreamed of in 1857. 'She thought she had counted the cost of her choice,' says Lord Acton, 'but she knew not what she had lost; what she really sacrificed was her right to freedom of speech, the first place among the women of her day, and a tomb in Westminster Abbey.' "

And at the end we have a summing up. "George Eliot had all the weaknesses of her sex. She was tender and generous, enthusiastic and devoted, ex-

acting, jealous, cowardly; . . . but the craving to hold within her hands the heart of a man had in her the peculiar intensity which it assumes in ugly women. To this was due the only serious fault of her life, and its greatest mistake. . . . All those who knew her have praised her for numberless great and rare qualities; but I have heard no one speak of her naturalness or her spontaneity. Her letters are entirely without the note of intimacy or familiarity, the easy or unexpected turn; to speak frankly they are entirely without grace, and as George Eliot was in her correspondence, so she would seem to have been in her daily walk and conversation. She answered completely to a child's idea of a celebrated woman: A lady one is afraid of and who talks only about things one can't understand. The seriousness of her mind and of her countenance was the cause of a very general misconception of her nature, and, attributing to her chiefly masculine characteristics, the public was often at a loss to explain her actions. Once more let me reiterate it: the truth lies at the other extreme; if we keep this fact in mind her life is perfectly clear. As soon as we forget it, the story of George Eliot becomes an enigma."

It is easy to see that Mme. Barine's real sympathy and enthusiasm are reserved for Jane Carlyle, baking bread in the solitary night watches, and for St. Teresa, wielding her broom with passionate energy in the intervals of her conference with Popes and Archbishops and of her mystical trances and ecstasies. For these women did not

shirk the pettiest detail of their woman's lot; their most original and luminous ideas, their most ethereal visions, dawned upon them amid the dust and turmoil of strenuous daily living.

I said a little while ago that we need not expect to avoid the sadness inseparable from every sincere study of life; but may we not at least hope to extract from the history of these famous women an answer to our irrepressible question: Was it worth while? The heroine of the essay which closes this series does not await our question. Her unhesitating, uncompromising "No" echoes through the pages of her story with a sad reiteration.

Sonia Kovalevsky was a young Russian woman of noble birth brought up rigidly under the old régime. After breaking lightly through the hedge of prejudice of her caste and her country, she won for herself, with the same ease and joyousness, a place in the foremost rank of contemporary scientists, made substantial additions to the discoveries of Lagrange and Euler, and filled for several years the chair of Mathematics at the University of Stockholm. Finally, however, this brilliant and successful scholar, still quite young, died of a malady so rare in our day as to be quite beyond the physician's power of diagnosis—a broken heart.

Mme. Barine has evoked for us all the elusive, baffling magic of this Slav nature, where heart and brain, reason and temperament, ambition and tenderness, are for ever at war. Though we know the end from the beginning, still we follow with bated breath the slender, spirit-like form, with its shining

eyes, and child-like smile, through the years of her forlorn childhood shut up in a Russian nursery where the windows were never opened, past her agitated, adventurous youth, to the day of complete and glorious reward. We witness her splendid success in Paris, where the Bordin prize, offered by the Academy of Sciences for the most important contribution to an abstruse department of applied mathematics, was awarded to her by unanimous vote; and it is with an almost intolerable pang of pity and chagrin that we perceive how hollow is this triumph, how empty and desolate the heart which from our point of view should be bursting with pride and exultation.

And it is now, with this vivid and haunting picture still before our eyes, that Arvède Barine throws off the veil of parable and utters plainly her whole mind. It is here and now, at the opening of the new century, that, with a solemnity and an authority which become her well, this woman calls upon the women of her generation to pause a moment, as it were between two worlds, and take account once for all, without passion or prejudice, of this past which they are so eager to leave behind, this untried future upon which they are so anxious to set sail.

"Sonia Kovalevsky had dreamed the most extravagant dreams, and behold! they all came true. She had broken with custom and prejudice and had set at naught the wishes of her family and friends, and, so far as men's eyes could see, no punishment had overtaken her sins. Her family had come to accept the

situation, and public opinion had relented in the face of the integrity and the courage of the young outlaw. She had defied nature, which had made her a woman, while she had willed to accomplish a man's work in the world, and that indulgent mother had not taken vengeance on her mutinous child. What had she to regret? What more could she desire? Everything in life had gone her way. . . . Except two or three friends who held their peace, no one doubted that this woman was one of the great victors in the battle of life.

"Sonia Kovalevsky died young, after having exacted from her most confidential friend, the witness of her struggles, a promise to tell her story to the world. And lo! it appears that underneath all this glory and this admiration there were only ashes and tears, disappointment and despair. 'I have had,' said she, 'everything in life except the one thing needful.' This one thing needful which had been denied her was the life of the affections. Had she, indeed, mistaken her place ignorantly, and because it is our fate always to grope in the dark? Or had she not rather laid claim to a double portion at life's great banquet, and was this the mistake for which she was doomed to suffer even unto death?"

And Sonia Kovalevsky's case is typical, insists Mme. Barine. She is probably the most conspicuous and shining example of a woman whose brilliant and original gifts were developed by precisely the same training and discipline as if she had been a man, whose achievements received the same rewards and encouragements, only enhanced by her personal charm and the glamour of her sex. What voice shall reach us? whose testimony convince, if not hers?

"According to her own explanation . . . her un-

happiness was the result of the dualism of her nature, which never allowed her to forget the discord between her feelings and her thought, between her longing to abandon herself completely to the object of her affection and the equally strong impulse to preserve her independence intact. It was the result of that eternal dualism which will inevitably rise in any woman gifted with creative powers, as soon as the passion of love awakens in her heart and asserts its power over her life.

"Sonia Kovalevsky's character was the consequence of her extraordinary intellect. Men of unusual gifts are almost always aggressive and absorbing. We are not to suppose that women will be otherwise if their cherished dream of intellectual equality comes to pass. The Christian theory of marriage had subordinated the individuality of the wife to that of the husband. The wife, under this régime, had the right to develop herself in such direction and to such a degree only as was consistent with the supremacy of the chief of the community. This was the price she paid for the protection assured her at the domestic hearth and for the heavy burdens she imposed. Today this division appears to her unequal and unjust. Is she right or wrong? I cannot say; there is so much to consider on both sides of the question. But let her rest assured of one thing: she must make her choice between the advantages, such as they are, of her present lot and those which await her if the new ideals prevail. Whether she admits it or not, she has a lurking hope that she may be able to hold fast what she has with one hand, while the other grasps the new treasures she covets; but this is an illusion. Men will never allow the tables to be turned upon them; they would be incapable of enduring a situation so anomalous."

This sad story is told with an intensity of restrained emotion, with a power of vision and real-

ization, an exquisite delicacy and lightness of hand, which makes it a masterpiece of analysis and of interpretation, of creative criticism of the highest kind. And yet in the end Mme. Barine's conclusions leave us, to a certain degree, dissatisfied. For we may question—many of us will emphatically deny—the validity of her first assumption. We may suggest that Sonia Kovalevsky was a law unto herself, and not, in many important particulars, a type of womankind either great or small. We may question whether her capricious, ill-balanced, essentially unreasonable nature was really the result of her powerful intellect or only her inheritance from some remote Russian great-grandmother (such, indeed, is the tradition) who possessed these uncomfortable qualities unrelieved by genius. Genius is, by definition, exceptional, subject to no law of which we have knowledge. It is the wind of the spirit, blowing where it listeth and leaving no clue to the "whence" or the "whither." Many of the men and women of most powerful and original minds have either received from Heaven along with their other gifts, or won in the stern school of experience, the supreme power of ruling their own spirits. Poor Sonia, in spite of the abstract and impersonal subject of her studies, was perhaps but one more victim of the Romantic fallacy, and it is to be feared that for her happiness, under any conceivable conditions of actual life, would have been unattainable.

Arvède Barine began her literary career somewhat late. Had she written in her youth, would her

theories and opinions, her attitude toward life, have been different? We have all been taught only too thoroughly that the kingdom of this world belongs to the young, and something, no doubt, this woman's work has lost in enthusiasm, in fire and faith, if not in intensity of conviction. But I doubt if any of those who knew her in life, or who have come to know her through her work, would subtract one day from those slow-moving years which mellowed and ripened her spirit and made her at last a woman and a writer of such high and unique distinction. The good stars met in her horoscope and made her French woman and Huguenot. In her view of that world of Latin and Catholic civilization which she so loved, her Protestant tradition supplies just that little gesture of detachment—that slight, half-rueful but sympathetic and indulgent smile—that is the surest antidote for hysteria or fanaticism. Standing, as she does, on the table-land of middle life, equally remote from the narrowness and immobility of age and from the blind passions and rash absolutism of youth, her message comes to us with a peculiar power and dignity and cannot lightly be set aside. She is of a race whose women have played always a rôle of importance; her studies, both broad and deep, have brought her into contact with the most interesting and representative personalities of modern Europe, and she has had for her living friends and counsellors the foremost men of letters of her day.

If the translations which I have attempted are at all adequate, they may, perhaps, make it possible

to appreciate in some measure the quality of Mme. Barine's style. But, as always, the individual flavour eludes the interpreter, be his hand never so cunning, his eye never so keen. On the one hand, her speech has the idiomatic simplicity, the familiarity and homeliness, the *goût du terroir,* which belong to one whose roots have struck deep into her native soil; while, on the other, the perfect balance and rhythm of her period, the sober elegance and flexibility of her phrase, are her heritage from the tradition of the seventeenth century. She has much wit, but even more humour, and both her humour and pathos have their springs deep in her knowledge of the human heart. And when for her, as for St. Teresa, our low horizon is lifted and a ray of the light that never was on sea or land streams across her page, then her dreams and her visions are clothed with a subdued richness of colour and image, and adorned with a delicate play of fancy and a power of poetic suggestion which are of no age or country, but are the gift of the gods alone.

Arvède Barine's message to her generation has, it may be, a note of reaction; but she bows to the established fact. With that "sweet reasonableness" for which her people, if not her sex, has enjoyed so just a renown, she accepts the woman of the twentieth century as the logical outcome of forces set in motion by the nineteenth, the eighteenth, even her beloved seventeenth century. She acquiesces if she does not applaud. Her knowledge of women rests upon solid foundations. She judges and appraises them with a justice and a gentleness, a pro-

found insight and an inexhaustible compassion, to which I believe no man has ever attained. If she is a feminist at all, she is of the school to which M. Emile Faguet has recently proclaimed his adhesion—a feminist without illusions. When we read her calm and lucid presentation of the case we are forced to perceive that some problems, the solution of which we have been taking for granted, still await a final word. Nor can we entirely resist the suspicion that for the women of today—even for those whose feminism is most thorough-going—any immoderate elation of spirit, any parading with banners in the market-place, in anticipation of the glories of the new era, would be, like the crowing of the cock before midnight, distinctly premature, an error of taste as well as of judgment.

A LAW UNTO HERSELF

GEORGE SAND

"THE word genius, when once it has been uttered with respect to a woman, seems straightway to draw upon her the eyes of all mankind—and not without reason. For a woman of genius—even if her claims be not universally acknowledged, is yet too rare an apparition in our world not to deserve our closest attention." So speaks a modern Frenchwoman of distinction—herself a critic, and a keen observer of womankind. And the truth which her words express would be sufficient warrant, I think, for reopening from time to time the famous case of George Sand—even if men's knowledge of the great Frenchwoman were far more adequate than we can hope to find it, at least among those of English race and tradition.

In the yet unwritten history of feminism in the wider sense, every well attested "human document" will have its importance, and in spite of much ignorance and prejudice, the figure of George Sand stands forth with increasing distinctness as a complete and typical representation of the feminine genius—in its strength as in its weakness—in those elements which are simply human as in those which are incident to sex.

About ten years ago there appeared in the pages

GEORGE SAND AT EIGHTEEN
From a water color by Blaize.

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of *The North American Review* an article by Mr. Henry James, the occasion of which was the publication of the first volumes of Mme. Wladimir Karenine's life of George Sand. The essay is an excellent example of Mr. James's critical method. Insinuating, pervasive, enveloping, his light, cool touch does yet seem to lay bare the "very pulse of the machine"—as he disentangles all the weighty confusion of this curiously Russian presentation, and disengages and sets in high relief the always interesting, still enigmatical figure of the heroine, as she appears to him. It is scarcely necessary to add, however, that this image which he so wonderfully evokes is not, in all respects, the George Sand of Mme. Karenine, nor of the accepted tradition. By some strange warping, or limitation of vision, Mr. James sees in her everything that is anomalous, exotic, fascinating—everything, indeed, except a soul. The "levity" which he commends as a favourable mood in which to approach the great phenomenon has its place, perhaps, in the treatment of some episodes of her adventurous youth. These do sometimes fall, as he says, "into the hands of 'high comedy.' " But the generous, high-hearted enthusiasms of her maturer years, her words of eloquent and irreconcilable protest against oppression and injustice in all their forms—these are the most constant and significant manifestations of George Sand's genius; and any interpretation which fails to take account of these in its final estimate leaves the riddle darker than before.

Happily many vague but not the less injurious

rumours respecting George Sand have faded from men's minds, and more and more the truth—to her at least far kinder than fiction—is coming to its own.

Out of the peace and the silence which only death and time can bring there is emerging at last the vision of a great spirit—one so wide in its range of thought and feeling, so strong in its grasp upon the world and human life, so rich in its capacity for joy and sorrow, for love and pity, that after all the rules and measures that serve to define average men and women have been stretched to their utmost, we are still asking, bewildered: "Whereunto shall we liken this woman, and with what comparison shall we compare her?"

After an interval of ten years, the third volume of Mme. Karenine's Life has at last appeared, covering the years between 1836 and 1846, and freighted with a wealth of fresh information, of new documents, and hitherto unpublished correspondence. Mme. Karenine has given her life to this work, and it is, even in its present unfinished state, a monumental achievement, unique both in its merits and in its defects. Nothing save an intimate conviction that she has here to do with one of the great leaders and spiritual forces of all time, could justify the infinite pains, the microscopic detail with which Mme. Karenine has pursued her researches. The ordeal is severe; that George Sand comes out of it so little scathed is at least as much to her own credit as to that of her biographer.

Within the last twenty years several eminent

Frenchmen also have spoken their word—eloquent, severe, witty, or enthusiastic—about George Sand; and yet that tribute to which we return oftenest and with the deepest sense of inner satisfaction is not French, but was written more than thirty years ago, by that great Englishman whom we may well call the "Master of us all"—by Matthew Arnold:

"It is silent, that eloquent voice; it is sunk, that noble, that speaking head. We sum up as we best can what she said to us and we bid her adieu. From many hearts in many lands a troop of tender and grateful regrets converge toward the humble churchyard in Berry. Let them be joined by these words of sad homage from one of a nation which she esteemed and which knew her very little and very ill. Her guiding thought, which she did her best to make ours too, 'the sentiment of the ideal life, which is none other than man's normal life as we shall one day know it,' is in harmony with words and promises familiar to that sacred spot where she lies. She looks for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come."

Since those beautiful words died away, no English voice has spoken in anything like an adequate estimate of George Sand. But the muckraker has passed that way and has found, of course, abundant material for his unsavoury heap.

In a recent issue of a prominent Review occurs the following trenchant paragraph conceived in the very spirit of the Philistine and the iconoclast:

"Nothing can make a life of George Sand decent reading. Despite the extraordinary opulence, the

extravagance of her nature, she was a light woman —of light brain and very light morals. Her will-o'-the-wisp love affairs are as unsavoury reading as one can find. Her genius, such as it was, cannot make up for the radical coarseness of her mind." No, no, Sir Critic! That will never do! The answer is not—it never can be—so easy, obvious, and one-sided as that.

But what, pray, was this woman, about whom from the beginning men's judgments have differed so widely? How can one life, one personality, admit of interpretations so divergent? Armandine Lucie Aurore Dupin came into the world in Paris, July 1, 1804. She had a bad inheritance —a family history which savours rather of some chapter of Greek Mythology than of the decorous restraint of a Parish Register or the fly-leaf of a family Bible. Her genealogy takes extraordinary leaps across the map of Europe and runs up and down the social scale with startling agility. Her great-great-grandfather on her father's side was King Augustus the Strong of Poland, a monarch whose immorality was literally Olympian and who counted his unauthorized offspring actually by the hundred. Her great-grandfather, Maurice of Saxony, the victor of Fontenoy, was a great general and a great lover, and he left among the débris and wreckage of his brilliant career, a certain little daughter, Marie Aurore, called de Saxe, whom he intrusted at his death to the tender mercies of the Dauphiness, daughter-in-law of Louis XV, her first cousin in blood though not in law. This little girl

was a strange, unique apparition in that turbulent strain—a sort of truce or breathing-space between the generations of strong, passionate, sensual men and women past and to come. Marie Aurore de Saxe grew up amid influences well fitted to corrupt the most innocent heart, but her life—full of vicissitudes as it was—was absolutely without adventure. An unlucky first marriage was immediately annulled, and for good cause, and at the age of thirty-three the young widow married, from motives of friendship and esteem, M. Dupin de Francueil, a man much older than herself. Maurice, her only son, was the father of George Sand.

As Mme. Dupin's son was her one great love, so his unfortunate marriage was her supreme sorrow, the one from which, to her life's end, other sorrows never ceased to flow. To the young soldier who followed Napoleon in his early campaigns, it might well seem that all the kingdoms of the earth were to be had for the taking. All around him he saw thrones and dominions played with like pieces on a chess-board. What did it matter, then, whether he wedded a queen or a beggar maid, since it was for his valour to win her a title or a crown? Even so it is still hard to understand how Maurice Dupin, the son of his mother, could have allowed his long connection with Sophie Victoire Delaborde—a mere waif of the Paris streets—to drift into a legal marriage.

Amid all these chronicles of irregular origin, we have a positive satisfaction in knowing that Aurore Dupin was born with a right to her name, but this

is our only consolation for an ill-starred marriage. Sophie Victoire was very far from exemplary in any relation, and when Maurice was dead and the one little girl left between the mother and grandmother, the scarcely repressed hostility between the two women, and her own passionate espousal of her mother's cause, combined to create a most unwholesome atmosphere for the rearing of any young creature, especially of one exceptionally impressionable like Aurore.

But for this also we have a certain compensation in George Sand's own account of those early days. Her portrait of her mother in the *Story of My Life* surpasses in vividness, in life-like detail and absorbing interest, anything she achieved in her most elaborate works of fiction. Mme. Maurice Dupin appears to have had the qualities of the typical grisette—all her faults and all her somewhat overpraised virtues. Of either justice or tenderness she was incapable. She loved and hated, cuffed and caressed, sobbed and sang, with the same sublime disregard of reason, of anything, indeed, except the caprice of the moment.

The grandmother, in spite of her immense unselfish affection, her strict sense of propriety and decorum, often erred from excess of zeal in her dealing with the child. When Sophie finally betook herself in high dudgeon back to Paris, leaving Aurore desperate and rebellious at Nohant, the older woman found no expedient wiser or more humane than to reveal to the daughter the unedifying record of her mother's career—calling a spade

a spade, with the directness of which our great-grandmothers had the gift.

With this revelation ended Aurore's carefree childhood. Henceforth hers was a nature in revolt against the injustice and hypocrisy of the world—represented by her grandmother—the world of law and order from which her adored mother had been cast out. Too late Mme. Dupin realized her mistake, and in terror of some violent outbreak, whisked the child suddenly away and placed her at a popular convent school in Paris. This change was wholly beneficial. For three years the little girl worked and played—a child again among children—in surroundings more normal than the solitude or melancholy tête-à-tête of Nohant. Her magic touch has revivified all the phases and aspects of this convent life and her own part in it, from her early "bad eminence" as ringleader in all the escapades of her school mates to the climax of her sensational conversion, which brought her to the end of her school days in a mood of saintly detachment from earth and of meek resignation to the opposition which her supposed vocation to the cloister was certain to meet.

But the world with its seductive promises, its perennial fascination, was waiting for Aurore at the convent gates, and her calling to the spiritual life died away. Her grandmother's death, with all the ensuing changes and formalities, brought her face to face once more with her mother—dear to her still, though no longer the object of her unreasoning adoration.

Many doors would have opened to the granddaughter and heiress of Mme. Dupin de Francueil, but even the least straight-laced of these respectable kinsfolk felt obliged to draw the line at Mme. Maurice. And with eyes wide open to the consequences of her choice, Aurore nevertheless elected to remain with her mother.

And then began for this convent-bred girl, with her grandmother's maxims still ringing in her ears, a period of embarrassment and discomfort hard to exaggerate. Her mother's worse than questionable manner of life, her recklessness and irresponsibility, quickly made the situation impossible, and, from the French point of view, there was only one honourable way of escape—marriage.

In 1822 Aurore was eighteen years old; not a beauty, scarcely even a pretty girl, but still with a fair share of feminine attractions. Her portraits, painted about this time, are conventional in the extreme. They show a still slender, rounded figure, a full face with the regulation fall of ringlets, features regular but a trifle inclined to heaviness, and very large, dark eyes as nearly as possible without expression. Brooding, solemn, mysterious eyes, still unawakened like the girl's soul; and there was no prophet at hand to utter a warning of the smouldering fires hidden in each! Evidently there was nothing for it but a husband—the Frenchman's sovereign remedy for the vagaries, agitations, and dangers of girlhood; and as a husband there was, it appeared, only one eligible aspirant. Casimir Dudevant was young, too, and of tolerably good

position and prospects. In person and manners he was not disagreeable, and Aurore (poor child!) was especially pleased with his studied moderation and reasonableness during the season of courtship. He seemed well fitted to be to her a good comrade and, chiefly, a refuge from the perplexities of her unprotected youth.

Everybody knows that this marriage was a failure. Husband and wife had nothing but youth in common. We may even spare some measure of compassion for Casimir himself. No doubt he was a poor creature—what Matthew Arnold calls the "average sensual man"—without delicacy and without principle, as unfit to administer his wife's fortune as to appreciate her gifts. Nevertheless, Fate played a cruel trick upon this mean and common man in mating him with a genius.

For eight years Aurore Dudevant accepted her lot, contented at first, then gradually borne down by a vague sense of loneliness, of humiliation, of an ever growing injustice and unkindness that degenerated at last into open and outrageous insult. The little son and daughter to whom she was to cling so desperately through all the coming years of struggle, were a sufficient reason for all possible concessions. When at last she wrested from her sullen but scarcely reluctant husband consent to an informal separation, her grounds of complaint were entirely valid.

But here is the parting of the ways. On the one side, Aurore Dudevant, unhappy, restless, vaguely dissatisfied with a world in which she seemed to

have no part or lot, but still irreproachable and still unaware of the forces latent in her heart and brain. On the other side is George Sand, the woman of genius, gradually awakening to the consciousness of herself and all her powers, and beginning to pour forth a succession of novels, stories, journals, plays, essays, pamphlets, and letters, to the wonder and delight—and also, sometimes, the scandal—of the world.

And she awoke, too, to the tempestuous depths of her own nature, to the passion and tumult which lay hidden beneath the sluggish surface of her soul. That deliverance from social tyranny, that freedom and scope for the unchecked expansion of the whole being—from henceforth she claimed it for all mankind, and first of all for herself.

It seems incredible that less than a century has passed since George Sand made her momentous pilgrimage to Paris to seek her fortune. It was the year 1831, the flowering season of the Romantic movement. The uneven streets of the old city, worn by so many generations of urgent, seeking feet, were trodden now by a band of impressive youths with flowing hair and beards, and long, full-skirted, flopping coats, which draped them picturesquely down to the heels. Their descendants still haunt the shady allées of the Luxembourg and the cafés of the Boulevard St. Michel—but with a difference. For certain of those young men of 1831 answered to the names of Victor Hugo, Alfred de Musset, Ste.-Beuve, Théophile Gautier. We shall not look upon their like again. And of this glorious com-

pany Aurore Dudevant was now to be one—even down to the trousers, the flopping coat, the swagger, and the cigarettes!

We cannot deny that this woman was intoxicated with her freedom. Her splendid physical organization in the full vigour of her youth, her long-thwarted desire for experience, for life in its fulness, all conspired to bewilder and betray her judgment. But it was not this alone, nor alone her instincts inherited from a lawless race. George Sand accepted—she helped to formulate, indeed—that first article of the Romantic creed which taught the divinity of Passion—spelled, if you please, with a capital P.

M. E. Caro, perhaps the most serious, temperate, and adequate of George Sand's modern critics, has said that a complete lack of resignation—that little humble Christian virtue—was a fundamental defect of this richly dowered nature. May we not go deeper yet and say that her greatest fault was pride? That humility which springs inevitably from self-knowledge she never knew. Hence her impatience of restraint, her extravagant demands upon life, her exaggerated estimate of the claim of her individual soul as against law and tradition; hence, too, her overweening self-confidence, and the absence of remorse which gives a tone of superficiality to her sincerest self-revelations.

And what then shall we say of this period of her life, that extended, roughly speaking, over fifteen years? If it were with Goethe or Byron that we had to do, we should call this her season of storm and

stress, and should wait, disapproving, yet with tolerable serenity, for the sowing of wild oats to come to its natural end. But she was not Goethe; she was not Byron; she was a woman. It is not, after all, the same thing.

How was it, then, that amid so much that was evil and impure, throughout the strange tragi-comedy of her many love affairs, succeeding one another with so disconcerting a rapidity—how was it, I ask, that her nature was not utterly demoralized and depraved? How could her ideals fail of degradation and final suffocation in the mire? But such was not the fact; George Sand did not deteriorate mentally or morally, paradoxical as this may seem; and it is here that our traditional code falls short and we must have recourse to a deeper, more fundamental law.

No, we will not give to the man and woman of genius a revised version of the Ten Commandments, but we may, perhaps, in return for all their gifts to us, grant them the privilege of individual hearings. If, on the one hand, we dare not forget the height from which they fall, nor the multitudes that they may have dragged with them in their collapse, we will give due weight, on the other, to the force of their temptations, and also to those extraordinary powers of recuperation and rehabilitation that may belong to their exceptional endowment.

George Sand's astonishing powers of reaction and rebound, as well as that slow but steady process of self-regeneration which worked itself out in

her career, were due in great part to the unparalleled vigour of her organization—the unequalled energy and vitality which were hers by inheritance. Disappointed she might be, disenchanted again and again, but it was always with the lover, never with love. To the end she believed with unshaken sincerity in love's divine mission to redeem and uplift the children of men, and her idealizing fancy clothed each new idol with the glory of the true gods. A selfish form of idealism, we must admit, and yet this perennial spontaneity and freshness of emotion are possible only to opulent, richly gifted natures like hers—let us acknowledge it with grateful humility. They are one proof the more of that interdependence of flesh and spirit against which we—poor birds of time that we are—beat our wings in vain revolt.

Nevertheless, looked at with our older and colder eyes, that most famous episode of her youth, her affair with Alfred de Musset, must appear scarcely worthy of its legendary fame. Mr. Henry James has called attention, with his usual acuteness, to the curious inconsistency of immortalizing by analogies to Romeo and Juliet, or Abelard and Héloise, a relation which was begun and ended in less than two years. Yes, the first reluctant acquaintance, the rapturous prelude and the flight to Venice; then, in swift succession, the first disagreement and rupture; de Musset's sudden alarming illness, when George Sand, all grievances forgotten, nursed him with all a mother's care and devotion; the disconcerting apparition of the young Italian doctor,—

jealousy, parting, temporary reconciliation, and final break—all within eighteen months. It was quick work, even with our American standards of swiftness.

And yet, we know that life is not at all times to be measured by hours or days. The heights and depths of those two natures were sounded in that brief season. If one of them outlived and, to a certain extent, outgrew the consequences of that experience, the other never did. To it we owe not only some of George Sand's most eloquent and poignant pages, but—what is perhaps of greater import—the full and perfect expression of Alfred de Musset's unique and original talent: a little vein of the purest and most personal, the sincerest and most inevitable poetry that I know in any age or language. And for him this experience was supreme and final. He had many "affairs" after as before, but only this one love. She was the sole reality of his life, and after she had gone out of it he moved as "one that walketh in a vain show."

We are still so deeply tinged with George Sand's own romanticism that we should probably have admired her more had she, too, faded, pined, and died like some fragile creature of her own romance. She was not of the sort that dies. Her grief and despondency were sincere and deep. Since Sappho loved and sang, no woman has sounded a more tragic note of despairing passion than echoes in some of the fragmentary letters to de Musset that remain. But she recovered, she rallied from her depression and turned her face resolutely toward

life and the future. And now, as always, literature was to be to her the one sure refuge from despair and perhaps madness, as well as against the more sordid miseries of poverty and dependence.

Whatever of the Bohemian she might boast, she was thoroughly *bourgeoise* in her capacity for steady and systematic work. In Venice, watching by the bedside of de Musset, in the intervals of his attacks of delirium; in her little apartment on the Quai Malaquais, with her baby Solange playing at her feet; at Nohant with her large heterogeneous household looking to her, depending on her—everywhere, the regular daily, weekly output was maintained. And this was not a mere eccentricity of genius, but a matter of stern need. Even after she had secured her divorce and made good her claim to the guardianship of her children, the allowance granted her by her husband (out of her own fortune, by the way), was absurdly inadequate for their support.

Of all the aspects and phases of this extraordinary personality, there is none so wonderful as George Sand's literary career. In 1829 the story-telling gifts of her school-days had lain unused, half forgotten perhaps for years. Yet lo! not only has she lost nothing, but her powers spring, as it were by magic, to their ripe maturity! And her style—flexible, abundant, graceful, picturesque—her technique, her mastery of all the resources and subtleties of her instrument—that this should reach at a bound, without fumbling, almost without any apprenticeship, its full-grown perfection, wellnigh

passes belief! Yet so it was; her first independent novels, *Indiana, Valentine,* are as characteristically her workmanship as anything she wrote at the height of her fame. Instinct, with her, was continually overtaking, out-running the slow processes of experience and time.

But remembering the anguish and travail of spirit through which most people—even thoughtful and cultivated people—attain to anything approaching literary form, it is with eyes of incredulous envy that we look upon this unlessoned girl, whose custom it was, we are told, to sit down to her writing when the night was already far spent, and rise up only when the first white streaks of dawn fell across her page. The fair, smooth, uncorrected page—of *Valentine,* for example, with its enchanting woodland-scenes, amid which young passion seems to spring and blossom by the same divine, inevitable law that wakes the cold earth from her winter sleep and decks the wild hawthorn with beauty and sweetness; Youth calling to Youth with a voice that will not be gainsaid. This was to be always the dominant note, as we know; this the great central theme upon which her idealizing fancy wrought with an infinite richness and variety of tone and expression to the end of her life. It is still the same, though we hear it now floating across the starlit lagoons of Venice, mingled with boatmen's careless songs and the lapping of water against marble steps; or breaking the solemn white silence of Alpine glaciers, or rising from the moon-

less depths of some haunted pool deep-hidden in the forests of Berry.

To one who knows George Sand but a little, her inspiration seems as various as are the settings of her tales; she moves from grave to gay; from tragedy to idyl, with the ease of Life itself. But to all who know her well, it has been revealed that she speaks but one language, brings but one message, has felt the heat of but one kindling and illuminating flame. And we have no other name for it than love; hackneyed as it is, soiled by a thousand sordid contacts, and associations base or trivial, it is yet the only word.

In youth, as we know, it was the personal passion; the blind and ruthless claiming of the heart's desire, the absorption of all the powers of being in the life of another. Nowhere else surely in French letters have young love's ecstasy and young love's despair found an utterance so large and free, so vibrant with eloquent sincerity. And the protest of the thwarted heart, its cry of revolt against the laws and customs that move to their hard impersonal ends across broken hearts and ruined lives—the discouragement and bitterness of the individual soul at bay—pitted against a heartless and stupid world! Verily, if eloquence, if poetic fervour and strong emotional appeal could move us from our ancient moorings, *Jacques, Lélia* must inevitably sweep us out to sea. All the disillusion and world-weariness, all the insatiable desires and infinite discontents that have ravaged the heart of man

since he was thrust out of Eden—all ring out like a great organ peal in Lélia's dying lament:

"For I am the Sibyl forsaken and left desolate, the spirit of ancient days imprisoned in a brain grown deaf to the voice of the god—a broken lyre, a dumb instrument whose message no man living can read, though there lingers still in its bosom a faint echo of eternal harmonies. Yea, I remember the caverns of truth, the ecstasy of revelation; but the key of human Fate—I have lost it; the spell of deliverance—it is gone from me. O Truth, Truth, in my quest of thee I have gone down into abysses black enough to affright the stoutest heart. Everywhere have I left of my flesh and my blood. I have explored all, suffered all, believed all, accepted all. Truth, Truth, thou hast not revealed thyself; though for ten thousand years I have sought thee, yet hast thou not showed me thy face."

The success of these early romances was immediate, unqualified, overwhelming. The world was at the feet of the Sibyl. As M. Doumic has said: "Thenceforth, to all those masculine tones which had arisen to call life accursed, there was added the voice of a woman, and lo! it rose clearer and stronger than all the rest." The twentieth century, long wonted to the performance of a full feminine chorus, bravely and strenuously carrying all the parts, cannot without a certain effort return to the experience of that earlier world, in which, for so many years, without prelude and without accompaniment, the great Prima Donna so splendidly filled the stage.

But life went on, and in its middle years Time laid a quieting hand upon the undisciplined heart —not to chill nor to harden, but only to steady its too tumultuous throbbing; that her eyes, cleared at last of the mists of passion and desire, might look out upon the world, the striving, sorrowful, inarticulate world; that she might feel upon her strong shoulders the burden of humanity.

And now for many years—for the rest of her life, indeed—George Sand was to be the organ of various socialistic and so-called "humanitarian" sects and systems. With all her old eloquence and impassioned conviction, she was to preach the new gospel, whether men would hear or whether they would forbear. As early as 1837 we begin to see in her writings distinct signs of transition—of a shifting of the centre of gravity. *Mauprat* is indeed a love tale; but here the barriers which love breaks down are not those of law and caste and prejudice, but the far deeper and more fatal obstacles of selfish pride, arrogance, and passion. And these lovers move no longer in a shadowy region of tropical islands and Alpine snows. Mauprat and Edmée dwell among their fellows in a very real provincial France, just before the Revolution, and they breathe an atmosphere already charged with the great ideas "Liberty, equality, fraternity."

It was a part of George Sand's femininity that she could not stand or go alone. She must have always both a cause and a hero. But among all her leaders and inspirers (and in her day their name in France

was legion) there was only one man of first-rate importance, and that was the Abbé Lamennais, heretic, and excommunicate, whose very radical theories of Christian Socialism were supported by the prestige of his great literary talents, as well as of his blameless and devoted life. Many of the chief thinkers of the time were counted among his converts, and upon George Sand his influence was decisive and permanent. The inherent injustice of the old order, in both church and state, the nobleness of labour and the great mission of art and science in the regeneration of the world—these were Lamennais's chief teachings, and they were to appear in various settings and combinations in many of her later works.

Was there some radical defect in the theories then in the air, or was it rather that George Sand failed completely to assimilate them? Certain it is that her pamphlets and articles, and even her so-called humanitarian novels—*Spiridion, Consuelo,* and the rest—are comparatively ineffective, both as literature and as teaching. Not only is her inspiration, as it were, divided, but her conception of the great reforms to be accomplished has more of enthusiasm than of enlightenment.

And in spite of all her faith and devotion, the millennium did not come. The Revolution, followed by the Republic of 1848, seemed at first destined to realize her most cherished hopes and ideals, but the political intrigues, insurrection, and finally civil war, which followed quickly in its train, were to her the bitterest grief and disenchantment. So many lives sacrificed, and the Gol-

den Age—the reign of Equality—no nearer than before! She was persuaded at last that "the Lord was not in the whirlwind," and with an impulse of strong revulsion she turned away from men and from movements back to the things she knew with the deep, sure knowledge of the affections. The so-called Pastoral romances of her third period are few in number and small in compass. They are not, I must admit, an adequate culmination of a genius which seemed, in its beginning, to portend an almost superhuman achievement. But, slight as they are, those three or four idyls—*La Mare au Diable, François le Champi, Les Maîtres Sonneurs,* and *La petite Fadette*—are none the less masterpieces, and masterpieces in a *genre* which George Sand originated and in which she has never been approached. Here, for the first time, these peasant folk are depicted, not from the outside by a condescending superior, but from within, by one who knew and loved them well enough to speak their language and think their thoughts, and yet, by the magic of her art, to lift their humble lives into the region of the ideal. They are very close to earth, those rugged figures. They have the large lines, the quiet colouring, the low relief of the Berry landscape, and they are now as much a part of it as were the mythical inhabitants of Grecian hill and stream and valley in the olden days.

The last twenty years of George Sand's life was a period of calm, of domestic peace and content. She lived for the most part at Nohant, with shorter and shorter intervals in Paris and abroad. Her be-

loved son, Maurice, was her inseparable companion, and later his gentle wife and their two little girls came to brighten and sweeten her days. She still wrote indefatigably, though the urgent need had ceased; and more and more as the century progressed, Nohant came to be a place of pilgrimage for the younger generation of writers that were growing up in France and elsewhere. The complete absence of arrogance, of vanity or literary snobbishness that always distinguished George Sand made her the most generous and encouraging of critics. Each new talent that began to unfold, she welcomed as a fresh glory to France, a fresh blessing to mankind.

But her correspondence is undoubtedly the most important literary activity of her later years. As a channel for self-revelation there is nothing, I believe, so sure as the familiar letter. Journals, autobiographies, confessions, can be, and usually are, edited and arranged at pleasure; but the letters, written without premeditation, from day to day, to all sorts and conditions of men, are an almost infallible index to the soul and life of the writer. Nobly indeed does George Sand emerge from the ordeal of all these many hundreds of pages. Her long exchange of letters with Gustave Flaubert shows us how wise and kind, how generous and tolerant, how sane and penetrating, had grown that spirit in which the storms of passion had once so furiously raged.

Perhaps, however, it is in her letters to her daughter Solange that this woman strikes the deep-

est, saddest note in all her wonderful range. This mysterious, wayward, fascinating daughter of George Sand! She was of that second generation of romanticists of whom we know too little. She had all the infinite craving, the vague discontent, the ruthless self-absorption of the great period. But the believing heart had gone from her. In her, enthusiasm was checked by a counter-current of scepticism, of cynical mockery and self-contempt. Or, may it not be that her chronic disillusionment and incurable ennui were but the long backward swing of the pendulum from her mother's impetuous, idolatrous youth? Who shall say? And who, listening for the limping foot of justice on the track of an erring mortal—who shall say that George Sand's own daughter was not her mother's severe and sufficient punishment on earth?

In summing up his impressions of George Sand after his visit to her at Nohant, Balzac would seek to explain all the contradictions and inconsistencies of her complex personality by affirming that she was "as little a woman as possible," and in this formula Mr. Henry James sees the best solution of the problem. These are great authorities, but I venture to dissent from both. George Sand's masculinity was for the most part in trifles—an affair of cigarettes and waistcoats. The secret of her strength, as of her weakness, is that she was as much as possible a woman. It was her womanhood, with its contempt of limitations, its demand of the unattainable, that sometimes, as in the Venetian episode, betrayed her into situations which any

man, at all approaching her in ability and honesty of purpose, would have avoided, as it were, by instinct. Much as she loved and sought ideas, she was never really at home in the region of pure intellect. Her ripe wisdom, her inspired good sense, were always overshadowed by her compassionate sympathy with her fellow-men. More fundamental than all those socialistic theories which from time to time carried her away, she attained, in her maturer years, to that spirit of true Democracy, found oftener, I think, in women than in men—a sobering sense of the great, dignified, elemental things that all men have in common—birth, love, suffering, and death.

George Sand has been dead for thirty-six years. The reticence and secrecy dictated by consideration for the feelings of the living is called for no longer. In 1904, on the occasion of the hundredth anniversary of her birth, much new light, from sources hitherto inaccessible, was thrown upon certain vexed problems and unanswered questions of her life. It is gratifying to observe that, under the closest scrutiny, the integrity, sincerity, and disinterestedness of her character do but emerge the clearer and the more admirable. On the other hand, it appears that her books are read less and less as the years go by, and, oddly enough, it is those very works whose appeal to her contemporaries was strongest that have most completely lost their hold upon us. With the exception of half a dozen volumes, retained as classics in the programs of colleges and schools, the dust gathers undisturbed

upon the long rows of books that bear her name. Strange and oft-repeated record of a woman's glory! Can it be that there is a supreme liberation of the spirit from the bond of the flesh—from our perishable mortal part—a final detachment, possible indeed to one man among a million, but of which the woman's nature eternally falls short?

The revival of interest which the centenary of George Sand's birth has evoked, and the consequent revision of judgment concerning her, is not without a message for us, as it suggests a reflection which may one day have a broader application. Whatever be the rule as to the fame of great women in general, this, the greatest woman of her time, will not, it appears, go down to future generations as the author of any consummate work of the creative imagination. If she is to take her place among the Immortals—and on this point it is still too early to hazard a prediction—it will be rather because of what she was in herself: a power, an influence, conveyed to us partially by her books, but more fully by her reflection in the minds and lives of others—the image of a generous, richly endowed, and beneficent human being, who in her passage through the world shed around her an atmosphere of healing and consolation, of hope and inspiration upon a great multitude of disinherited and discouraged sons of earth.

THE GREAT SALONIÈRE

MME. DE STAËL

ONE of the subtlest of recent critics, Mr. Paul Elmer More, has suggested a new theory of the feminine genius, which has at least the merit of setting the woman's gift clearly and sharply apart from that of the man. From his analysis of Christina Rossetti—a wonderfully penetrating and sympathetic study, by the way, of that rare and elusive spirit—Mr. More concludes that the peculiar passiveness of her mental attitude, her joyless acquiescence—the "everlasting yea" with which she meets the hard decrees of Fate and the tyrannous demands of life—make of this singer of lovely dirges the most perfect and satisfying type of genius in woman.

And though, at first sight, this judgment might seem but an unwarranted generalization of the critic's own fastidious and academic taste, yet there are not wanting intimations that his view is shared, more or less consciously by men of quite other sorts and conditions. For man, with his urgent impulses and passions, has always loved to think of woman as in all things ideally his opposite—the embodiment of that dream of serenity and peace, of unruffled calm of flesh and spirit which he is destined to long for and to seek after but never to find.

After all, however, it would seem that this is a

question of fact and not of theory. Our query is not, "Does this idea satisfy a deep craving of the masculine heart, and establish a more perfect symmetry, so to speak, in our conception of the respective qualities of men and women, but, is it *true? Have* those women who have graven their names most deeply in the heart of the race—have they been great by virtue of this spirit of resignation—of a passive acceptance of the established order of things and their own part in it?"

Mr. More's estimate of Christina Rossetti needs, I think, no qualification. In her, as in her brother, the mingling of two different strains has resulted in a talent of unique distinction. For sheer depth and purity of poetic inspiration, combined, as this is in her best work, with a complete mastery of her peculiar medium of expression, I know not her peer among women. Nor is she quite alone of her species. There are others who, set apart by the law of their own nature, from the noise and hurry of the active world, have wrought out for us, in solitude and silence the substance of their vision of Life. Of Eugénie de Guèrin we must all think—another creature of twilight and shadow—of strange renunciations, of unexplained but unquenchable tears! But even so, dare we affirm that this their spirit of "surrender to the powers of Life" is indeed the most elemental note of the feminine genius?

There is surely another type of greatness,—another feminine attribute—to which at least an equal place belongs. That quality, I mean, which has

made of the woman, in soul as in body, from the beginning of time, the "Mother of all living."

Joan of Arc, with her "visions" and her "voices" for the night; her sword, her armour and her intrepid front for the noonday; St. Teresa, rousing herself from rapt contemplation of ineffable mysteries, to intrigue, dispute, contrive like the wiliest Jesuit for the privileges of the order she had founded—what were they, after all but incarnations of the spirit of motherhood—protecting, brooding; by turns tender and terrible, fulfilling toward a larger world, with its greater needs, an office not unlike that of humbler mothers everywhere?

One might indeed reproach the woman with the lack of those very qualities in which Mr. More finds her peculiar strength. A certain incurable haste and fever, an incapacity to sit apart and wait until the time is ripe; a perennial immaturity and lack of finish—in these her critics have been wont to see the fatal weakness of woman's work. But I should be bold to claim for the truly representative woman of all ages, a great unselfishness—an obsession with the wrongs and sorrows of mankind, a passion to help and succor, which many faults and imperfections surely cannot discredit or outweigh.

In other words, it seems to me that genius in a woman is more nearly allied to and dependent on personality than in a man; so that it is very much harder for her to be great in spite of *herself*—of her character—than for him. Goethe's well-reasoned, deliberate and unrelenting egotism and cold-

ness of heart, are unthinkable in a woman—allied as they were in him with a real benevolence, unerring judgment and a truly God-like vision of men and things. No, we must be content to have on the one hand a Christina of Sweden, on the other a St. Teresa—we shall find no combination of the two.

And therefore the woman of past times is, as a rule, much harder to know than the man. Few women have left to posterity direct and tangible proof of their intellectual and artistic achievements. For the most part, their fame comes to us as an echo—a rumour passing down from age to age by the fragmentary and uncertain witness of men, whose praise or blame takes on, in the lapse of centuries, a strangely hollow and artificial tone. The great masterpieces of men stand, as they must, in their own strength, but, lacking these, who shall reproduce for us the magic of the woman's look and voice and gesture?—that once set throbbing the heart and brain of whole generations—and now alas, is dead even as they are. With few exceptions the woman's genius survives, if at all, only as it is reflected in the hearts and imagination of men.

Among the few women whose literary productions have claimed, and perhaps deserved, a permanent place by the sheer force and originality of the ideas they convey, no one can be compared, I suppose, with Germaine de Staël, born Necker, the daughter of Swiss parents, though herself born in Paris, in 1766.

This little Protestant girl was born into a strange

world. Audacious theories, bold speculations are not in themselves alarming, but here was a society which stood ready to translate its wildest dreams into everyday fact. It was this child's lot to be born when and where the current of modernism was strongest and most turbid. It was the France of the Encyclopedia, of the *"Contrat Social,"* and of the famous salons; the France still of Voltaire and Rousseau, and soon to be the France of Robespierre and the "Terror." And the words "born into this world" may here be taken almost in their literal sense, for at four years old the small Germaine was already, we are told, a well known figure in Mme. Necker's Salon, and the vision of the tiny quaintly dressed baby, seated among the guests on her own low stool, is not more humorous than pathetic, especially when the little image one day opens its mouth and launches full in the face of the most distinguished person present—so runs the story—the ominous question, "M. de Marmontel, what, pray, do you think of love?" Even in childhood this child thought too much of love.

The romantic attachment of M. and Mme. Necker was proverbial in frivolous, cynical Paris—the more so, perhaps, that Mme. Necker's character was to the last degree antipathetic to the French. She has been fortunate, no doubt, in a few devoted friendships and in her apologists; but when all has been said by way of extenuation and excuse, Susanne Curchod remains a type of a very subtle and refined egoism, none the less painful and wearing to herself and others because of the self-tortur-

ing scruples, the exaggerated conscientiousness that went along with it. Her fortunes changed, but she was always the same, from her obscure and pretentious girlhood, when her vanity was nourished by the admiring attentions of a small provincial circle—even to her last sad months, when she spent her failing strength in devising ceremonies for her funeral and for the recurring anniversaries of her death. Her great ambition had been more than satisfied in her husband's political and financial success, and she had planned for her daughter a career after her own heart. Her theory of education seems to have combined repression with overstimulation in about equal parts, and if the system of merciless cramming which she forced upon Germaine did not stupefy the young brain and exhaust the young body, the thanks are due to the interference of an enlightened physician, who prescribed freedom and fresh air—just in time. In her mother's eyes henceforth Germaine's upbringing was a failure, her brilliant career a disappointment. She met praise and felicitation with a shake of the head and the disconsolate murmur: "O, she is nothing, *nothing* compared to what she would have been, if I had had my way with her."

As for M. Necker, his fame as a great man has been tottering for many years—in spite of his daughter's idolatrous devotion and pertinacious championship. Modern statesmen are sceptical of the value of those financial policies, supported by armies of figures, which were to have saved the Bourbon's throne—but no one has ever doubted

that he was a devoted husband, an indulgent father and an excellent man.

A dream of married happiness such as her parents had known haunted Germaine throughout her whole career and it had about it always a taint of the morbid—not to say of the mawkish. Not for nothing had she been a daily witness of the excessive self-effacement of the wife; of the laborious, almost anxious tenderness of the husband. It was all admirable in its way, no doubt, but it was *their* lot; it was never to be hers, though the memory of it, the longing for it, were perhaps the underlying cause of some of her most fatal errors in the conduct of her own life, as well as of the tone of melancholy and disillusionment which is never far below the surface of her most enthusiastic mood.

That famous saying of hers, "Glory can never be for a woman anything, save a splendid mourning garb, worn for the happiness she has lost" is a striking bit of picturesque phrasing. It has served as text for many warnings against the ambition of certain women, for whom "glory" was the last and remotest of perils. But the worst of it is that the maxim is not *true*. It was not true for Germaine Necker; for glory, *real* glory, remains after all, as Renan has said, "that which in this world is least likely to prove to be vanity," and at her heart's core no one knew that better than she. The life of the affections alone would not have satisfied her; and how can we picture the woman who for fifteen years steadily resisted the will of Napoleon himself—how can we fancy her, spending her days in

contented obscurity, in the shadow of a husband, however excellent and devoted! She was much better—nay much happier, in her high and courageous loneliness.

Moreover no woman ever lived who would more thoroughly have enjoyed and profited by the modern freedom and rational independence of her sex than Germaine Necker. Her claims to good looks or physical attractions of any sort were of the smallest, though her biographers would fain persuade us to the contrary, by dwelling upon the power and beauty of her great dark eyes, upon her shapely hands and arms and stately carriage. If she could have been set free once for all from that inordinate appetite for admiration, for approbation, which laid her bare to every random shaft of ridicule and malice, many rough places might have smoothed themselves, many crooked paths grown straight before her feet.

But, oddly enough, she never dreamed of any possible emancipation for women of her world. She sometimes bewailed the servitude of her sex, and openly in words and secretly in act, she often set at naught the conventions. But theoretically she adhered all her life to her mother's maxim: "It is the man's place to brave public opinion, the woman's to submit to it." Madame de Staël remained always the "great lady" of genius.

To the mere looker-on, the France of the eighteenth century might seem pre-eminently the woman's age and country. No doubt they wielded a real power—those brilliant women of the great salons

who made and broke reputations and careers with an epigram. But all this influence and popularity were not without price. They were bought by the most unscrupulous intrigues, political and social, on the one hand, and on the other, by compromises of honour and dignity and decency, which, even after two hundred years, fill one with a sort of physical disgust. All those forms of deference and adulation did but scantily cover the ugly truth. The basis of that life was sensuality, and where that is so, the woman is always the victim and the spoils.

This was Germaine Necker's world and from its moral contagion she could not wholly escape, any more than from its false and artificial standards of taste and its rather hectic intellectual activity. But in great issues, when her own passions were not involved, in the decision of great questions, this woman's courage, her will to look the truth in the face, her farseeing, incorruptible resistance to the current that was sweeping France (and after her all Europe) into the grasp of a military despotism—all these things belong to a spirit divinely free—we may almost say, to the only free spirit left in a Europe, where Goethe lived and practised his bows to the Grand Duke, and, in due time, even made graceful speeches to the great tyrant himself.

Advanced views of democracy and equality prevailed in the Necker circle, but they did not apparently have any influence upon the parents' plans for their daughter's establishment. Germaine—already very much of a person—brilliant enough, disquieting enough in mind and temperament to

give wiser parents pause—Germaine was married at twenty to the Baron von Staël Holstein, Swedish Ambassador to France. Girls of the Latin races seem even yet a little slow to open their eyes. From our Anglo-Saxon and Puritan standpoint, their hearts have a way of waking up just in time to devastate their lives—when indeed both they and their families might well hope that the dulness and security of domestic life had lulled them to sleep once for all. Germaine felt no serious reluctance to accept this very desirable parti—nearly twice her age, and a foreigner besides. A well bred, well disposed but somewhat light and insignificant sort of person—the Baron, whose Protestantism together with his rank, which appealed strongly to Mme. Necker, seem to have been his chief recommendations; but the marriage was probably quite as happy and respectable as the majority of such arrangements in that time and world. There was never any open scandal, and though, after a number of years, a separation was agreed upon, the motive seems to have been financial—De Staël was a terrible spendthrift—rather than moral. The three children were brought up to respect both parents and finally when their father was old and ill, his wife went to him and nursed him faithfully till he died. So much her respect for tradition and public opinion could accomplish, but Germaine's heart was never in this marriage, and hers was not a heart to be left out of account with impunity. For she was a creature of the tempest, such as the eighteenth century, the age of Reason, loved to bring forth, in mockery of

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its own pretensions—one in whom a strong will, religious scruples, habits of self-control and of calm judgment were overborne and swept away in an instant by an onrush of tumultuous emotion.

She had one or two transient fancies in her youth, and then, when her hour was fully come, she fell a victim to one great and most unhappy passion which laid waste her heart and dragged its slow and poisonous length across the eight best years of her life. It was not an abject or degrading passion; its appeal was not chiefly to her lower nature; but none the less surely, for the sort of perverted exaltation that disguised it, did this untoward love sap the very springs of her inner life.

Germaine de Staël's long connection with Benjamin Constant is one of the famous love affairs of history as well as of literature, as famous as that of de Musset with George Sand, though very unlike it. One side of this story—the man's—is narrated at length and in minute detail in *Adolphe*, Constant's only novel, which is a masterpiece of impersonal, detached self-analysis and self-revelation, and leaves the reader divided between a somewhat breathless admiration of the author's unexampled candour and psychological insight, and a sort of horror of the coldness and aridity of the nature laid bare. Adolphe stands self-confessed, a spirit capable of passion, but for whom tenderness and faithfulness have no meaning. On the woman's side the record is not less plain for him who has eyes to see. In the imaginative works of Mme. de Staël's maturer years, love appears, not as the

innocent idyll of youth, nor yet as the more or less culpable pastime of men and women of the world. Love for her is henceforth tragedy. It is the chronicle of the woman's always-losing battle—of the woman, struggling single-handed with tradition and prejudice, above all, with the incurable feebleness and inadequacy of the man's soul. She judged (as we all judge) by what she knew.

A tone of almost monotonous depression and discouragement pervades her two famous novels, *Delphine* and *Corinne.* But whenever this woman could escape from the narrow range of personal loves and hates, hopes and fears, when she could make good her entrance into the larger world of thought and ideas, how swiftly did the key change! Then her tears dried of themselves, in the white heat of her righteous wrath; she shook off her pose of half conventional melancholy, and went forth joyously to take her part in the great "liberation war of Humanity."

Woman has been always very generous, it seems to me, in according to man everything that he desires to fulfil his own ideal of himself. But it must tax her patience sometimes, one would think, to see him calmly, without scruple or remorse, gather, with a sweep of his arm, into his own portion, all the nobler qualities of the soul—simply by calling them masculine. One would scarcely apply that epithet to Mme. de Staël, to her character, or to her achievements, unless indeed there be no other word to describe strength, frankness, courage and a noble disinterestedness in the pursuit of truth;

and in her these qualities seem not coldly intellectual, but rather emanations from a great generosity and benevolence of nature, a deep-lying faith in humanity which even the horrors of the Revolution could not discourage, and which made life worth while in the darkest hours of anarchy or despotism. In her last days Mme. de Staël said that she had had three great loves: God, her father and Liberty. And it may well be that, as she grew older, these three seemed more and more to merge themselves in one great benignant and wonder-working Power:—a glorious Trinity which spoke to her ear with one voice, forbidding her to despair of mankind or of the world.

In the early years of the Revolutionary period, Mme. de Staël's salon at the Swedish Embassy in the *rue du Bac* was at the height of its vogue, the most brilliant in Paris. Men of every nation, of every shade of opinion were gathered there, and absolute freedom of thought and speech was the distinguishing note of their intercourse. But the hostess was the real centre and inspiration of those memorable reunions, of which many reminiscences have come to us but no adequate description—none at least, that conveys to us even faintly the effect produced by Mme. de Staël's conversation or the qualities which set her, as a talker, apart from all others.

Indeed if we are to form a clear conception of Mme. de Staël's manner of speech, we must find a way to bring our clumsy Anglo-Saxon faculties into

a certain degree of sympathy with this distinctively French attitude of mind; must admit that perfect sincerity and disinterested enthusiasm can exist, side by side with the keenest regard to dramatic effect, and even sometimes, with a certain degree of rather childish vanity, and self-complacency in personal success. No doubt, Mme. de Staël liked exceedingly to shine, but she did not expect nor desire to shine alone. For to the French conversation was—is still perhaps—one of the fine arts, and their ideal of it embraces not only one star, solo part, however brilliant, with all the other rôles filled with puppets, but a complete, well-balanced performance.

A dark-skinned, thick-lipped woman, without beauty, heavy alike in feature and figure and with a style of dress that betrayed a love for the picturesque rather than a true Parisian's sense of harmony and grace—she yet possessed a wonderful and compelling charm. A magic spell, it seemed, that, for the time, transfigured her whole being and held her hearers breathless and enthralled; while for those who came habitually under its influence, this conversation of hers grew to be an urgent need, a sort of element or atmosphere without which their spirits languished and grew faint. Yet we cannot claim for her speech the supreme felicity and inevitableness of form that gives to La Rochefoucauld's maxims a sort of finality like that of the Ten Commandments, and even to the sayings of Mme. du Deffand something of the hardness and

brilliancy of a diamond. That sort of high-polished perfection was not the source of Mme. de Staël's power.

She was very unlike, in many ways, the typical hostess of a salon in the eighteenth century. For most of those shrewd and clever women, the holding of a *bureau d'esprit* was a matter of business. They were seeking success in some form, literary, political, social, and often with a purely personal, selfish aim. But here was one woman to whom the Revolution was a sacred thing, a great and splendid revolt of the human spirit against the powers of darkness.

Much, therefore, that might seem perhaps, in this cult of the idea and of the spoken word, like mere intellectual fustian, was to Mme. de Staël the very stuff of which life is made. She was capable, we know, from many witnesses, of exquisite graciousness, of infinite delicacy and tact in reassuring and fostering the timid, and she gloried in the strength of a worthy antagonist. But, after all, conversation was to her verily the sword of the Spirit, worthy the best efforts of the loftiest minds. And so, at the close of one of those famous evenings of hers, when the subject had been tossed from lip to lip among the speakers, and played upon in turn from every angle of vision, it was her wont, we are told, to gather up the scattered threads of the discussion and hold the great thought for a little while in her own hands, as if for a final shaping and polishing, that no aspect of it might be lost or obscured, when it went forth to do its work among

men. Thus, without bitterness or contention, did she set her mark upon it—seal it with her own seal.

Upon this magnanimous if somewhat unpractical group of theorists, the awful events of the Reign of Terror fell with a shock as of a crumbling world, and for a season the most optimistic were dumb. This then was the outcome of the rule of Reason, such the first fruits of "liberty, equality and fraternity."

With Mme. de Staël compassion was responsive to every call, and for her it was never a sterile emotion, but a veritable passion to help and save all whom her arm could reach, without respect of person or party. Her position as wife of the Swedish Ambassador made her, for a time at least, comparatively safe in Paris, and she used her official immunity, her old prestige as Necker's daughter and one whose liberal sympathies were well known —she wore all these pretexts threadbare—and her woman's wits, her social experience and tact besides, to snatch from death one and yet another human creature, whose only claim upon her was his desperate need. Again and again did she penetrate to the secret councils of the Convention to plead for some life, and exhaust every resource in her appeals to Robespierre or Tallien—and rarely, it must be added, in vain.

But the "Terror" went its way to its appointed end, and after a year of unwilling absence, Mme. de Staël returned to Paris to confront her great Enemy.

Back to Paris, still a city of waking dreams, to whose generous enthusiasm all things seemed possible, came also the great Realist. He came in a blaze of military glory followed by his victorious legions, and the legend of his Italian campaigns, the first canto of the great Epic of European conquest, was well fitted to inflame the quick imagination of the French, in whom love of glory has always been the most enduring passion.

To Mme. de Staël Napoleon's unique and essentially Latin genius appealed, at the first, with extraordinary force. In him she believed all the great principles of the Revolution were to triumph —were to receive their final consecration, in the glorious peace which a liberated France was to impose, by his hand, upon the world. She was young too and a woman, who had no reason to distrust her own powers of attraction—powers so hard to divine today behind the crude colours and harsh outlines of her pictured face and form. It may very well be that in her patriotic zeal there mingled some alloy of personal ambition and vanity—in fancy she saw herself perhaps the guiding star of the great Ship of State—the inspiring muse of the hero and through him the arbiter of Europe. But very soon her faith began to falter—partly no doubt because of Napoleon's rough and tactless rejection of her advances, but more and more from a sort of dumb terror and distrust which the great man's demeanour was well fitted to arouse in one like Mme. de Staël. She ascribes her growing antagonism to her father's example and teachings, but it goes

deeper than that—rooted, no doubt, in her half-conscious intuitions, her unreasoned perception, that this man was the predestined Arch-Enemy of ideas, the great Opportunist, whose deep and scornful knowledge of men had taught him to rule them through their weakness and meanness, rather than by an appeal to a soul in which he did not believe. These two were foes inevitably and irreconcilably; any truce between them must have been hollow, and the woman, not without protests and appeals, finally accepted the situation.

Mme. de Staël has been blamed for her perpetual and often rather querulous complaints and lamentations over her exile and her adversary's implacable hate. But less has been said of the note of almost childish petulance in Napoleon's chidings and reproaches of Mme. de Staël. So inconceivable to him was the force of moral convictions, that he seems never to have doubted that this troublesome woman could, if she only would, make it up with him and his régime at any time and live good and happy ever after. Once assured, however, that he could neither cajole nor compel her into conformity, he determined to be rid once for all of a hostile influence he did not overestimate.

With the issuing of the consular edict which banished her to a distance of forty leagues from the Capital, begins for Mme. de Staël the long period of exile—so dreary, wearing and humiliating to her proud, ardent nature; so refining, chastening and developing to her mind and soul! Freed at last, against her will, from the absorbing interests of

Paris, and of her own people, she had leisure to become aware of the great world-forces, working themselves out in other ways among other races of men. And it may be said to Mme. de Staël's great glory that hers was the first French mind (and the list of those who came after her is not long) which lifted itself to a European point of view. Her half-foreign ancestry, her Protestant faith, even her abhorrence of the régime in power in her own country—all these may be counted for something in her detached and impartial attitude, but these are not enough by themselves. She was really seeking truth and light and could by no means find rest in lies, however specious. For her, *liberty* meant first of all the freedom of the spirit, and how could she fail to perceive that in unprogressive, phlegmatic, prince-ridden Germany, of the old provincial régime, men's souls were oftener freer than at home? It is this particular openness of mind and singleness of heart that give distinction to her views. She was not without vanity as we know; her early training had fostered an almost morbid craving for excitement and social diversion, and her hatred of Napoleon, no doubt, made her often unjust both to him and to France—for which nevertheless she longed with inextinguishable desire. But over and over again was she offered all the privileges and rewards which the Empire had to bestow, for some trifling concession—a few words celebrating the Emperor's latest victory, a paragraph of flattering prophecy on the occasion of the birth of the Prince Imperial. And she always re-

fused. While so many of her ancient comrades, sometime apostles of Liberty, found their account in compromise with the powers that were! Constant, Talleyrand, and other smaller men found, at one time or another, some middle ground on which their old principles and present interests could walk without unduly jostling one another. But Mme. de Staël could see only one way, and that led her now across the Rhine.

And this reluctant pilgrimage was the climax and consummation of her career. By the mere act of going deliberately into remote exile, she made it plain that while Napoleon might blockade England, bully Germany, and threaten Russia, his power came to a halt at the door of one will, one conscience. Moreover, this fine self-affirmation of hers did in some subtle manner heighten her own perceptive powers, emancipate her judgment and make possible to her the task of comprehending and interpreting an alien race and civilization. Her slighter, more distinctively feminine qualities also, her receptivity, power of adaptation and inextinguishable desire to please, stood her in good stead in the great enterprise which gradually shaped itself in her mind. Above all she was not afraid of work. To an impulsive, passionate nature like hers, whose whole philosophy of life is based upon the overestimate of emotion, as a thing noble in itself, it is impossible to exaggerate the value of strenuous, purposeful, engrossing, intellectual exertion. The more vigorous the nature, the more complete and wholesome is the reaction. No better

specific has been found, I believe, for wearing anxiety, disappointed affections or a broken heart. So it proved with Mme. de Staël. For a time at least she was too busy—too interested to dwell on her wrongs.

Weimar, whither she betook herself, note book in hand, as fast as the clumsy coaches of the time and the manifold delays incident to travel would permit, was emphatically a man's world; the woman's part, even in courtly circles, was restricted to that of listener, or at most, of unobtrusive accompanist to the masculine performer. But in every situation into which life had led Mme. de Staël hitherto, she had always stepped into the first place as by divine right. The flare of the limelights was dearer to her than sun, moon and stars, and—a point of still greater importance—she was used to the almost exclusive society of men and liked it. Here for her was an interesting program, days and nights abounding in stimulus.

It is hard to be quite as sorry for Mme de Staël as she seems to expect, when we recall the men with whom, during her sojourn in Weimar and Berlin, she spoke familiarly face to face. Besides the Grand-ducal family of Weimar, who appear unaffectedly to have loved and admired her, she made acquaintance with the brothers Schlegel, with whom her intercourse ripened into close and intimate friendship, with Fichte, Schelling and Schiller, and finally after some solemn coquetting on the great man's part, with Goethe himself. And in spite of some national and personal prejudice and misun-

derstanding, they all, in the end, came to like and esteem her sincerely. What these Germans saw in her first was her limitless craving for discussion, a somewhat disconcerting appetite for this people of heavier brain and slower speech; but then they saw too her transparent simplicity and honesty of mind, the piercing clearness of her intellectual vision, and her absolute generosity and good faith. Both in Weimar and in Berlin Mme. de Staël was a success.

Weimar was very well as an interlude, but it could be for her no "continuing city." She was drawn back to France as by invisible cords, although the Emperor, far from forgetting her in her long absence, seemed to exercise his ingenuity in devising against her new measures of petty and harassing persecution. Her home at Coppet was very lonely now, since her best friends no longer gathered about her there, held away either by their fears or by direct prohibition and penalty.

And so once more she took up her dreary march, —up and down, to and fro through that Europe which year by year contracted about her, until it seemed that soon no spot of free soil would remain where she might rest the sole of her foot. More and more closely the Emperor's net enmeshed her till at last her thoughts turned in all seriousness to the great free Republic across the sea, as a final refuge for herself and her beloved children.

The fall of the Empire in 1814 summoned her back to Paris, but it was in no festal mood. In spite of all she had said and written in dispraise of

France, she was far too true a Frenchwoman to rejoice in a personal deliverance that meant defeat and humiliation to her country, and it was quickly brought home to her that the enemies of Napoleon whom she had indoctrinated and encouraged in her exile, were, under a very thin veneer, the enemies of France and of the liberty that she loved.

Her personal glory was at its height—kings and potentates consulted and treated with her as with a European power, but her strength was broken, if not her spirit. For years Mme. de Staël had suffered from a lingering and painful disease. In 1817 in Paris, surrounded and consoled by her children and her friends, she died, in the full maturity of her powers and at the height of her fame. She is buried beside her parents at Coppet, the home of her exile, and the place which more than any other is bound up with her fame and her active and agitated career.

But Mme de Staël's books! The row of substantial volumes that bear witness to her industry, her many sided interests and her one-time popularity—they have certainly grown old and become difficult reading—had grown difficult indeed, before the last of that generation had passed away, which had been nurtured in her ideas. Ste.-Beuve, protesting loyally against the neglect into which she had fallen even in his day, prophesied that she would have her revival; and many may indeed go back to her, but it will scarcely be as they go back to Pascal and Bossuet, or even to Voltaire and Rousseau—not for pleasure, not for that subtle heightening

of the emotions, that sense of the enlargement of the bounds of life, which is the ineffable gift of the great masters.

For we are come at last to the root of the matter: why was not she whose speech and personal presence have left so indelible an impression on the greatest minds of her generation, whose wisdom and insight have made plain so many puzzling problems —why was she not also a great writer?

We cannot reproach her with the absence of an independent and original system of philosophy; in this respect Voltaire was but little better furnished than she, and Chateaubriand very much worse. She was the child of her age. She utters the great doctrines of the eighteenth century—its theories concerning liberty and progress, of the freedom of the will and of the goodness of human nature. She gives them to us unchanged in essence but touched and vivified by that infusion of warm and generous feeling which she called enthusiasm and which remains the most characteristic note of her teaching.

Critics and historians have done their best for Mme. de Staël, when they have spoken of the general "nobleness" and "elevation" of her writing. The truth is she has no sustained style, her books no structure, in the technical sense. She has eloquence sometimes, often emotion; often also she finds a vigorous and original utterance for isolated reflections or sentiments. But in narrative, exposition or description of any length or scope she falls into abstract, inaccurate and commonplace forms

of expression; her thought, her image, reaches us without sharpness of outline, or vividness of colour, the whole effect dulled by an instrument not finely tempered enough for its task. The supreme gift of "the Word" was not hers, and among all French authors of anything like her importance she is probably the least read.

Her earlier works, the *Essay on Rousseau* and that on the *Passions*, and her first real book, that on *Literature*, in which she applies to the history of letters the favourite doctrine of the eighteenth century, the theory of perfectibility; or in other words, of the perpetual and uninterrupted progress of the human race toward perfection—these essays are all full of acute personal observations and fruitful suggestions, but to the modern reader they are made almost inaccessible by their confused and incoherent arrangement and their heavy unattractive style. The popularity of *Delphine*, a novel in epistolary form, waned early, but the fame of *Corinne* is attested by the praises and the tears of two generations. For Corinne is Mme. de Staël's ideal of herself, and the story of that brief, beautiful and most sorrowful career, her ill-starred love and untimely death are told with a tragic sincerity and poignancy that strike home even yet through all the clumsy guide-book setting.

Her last book, entitled *Considerations Concerning the French Revolution* (her titles are always disheartening), was left unfinished. It is an elaborate apology for her father's administration and a defence of his financial policy, which if pursued

unhampered would, she believed, have spared France the excesses of the "Terror" and the not less fatal reaction toward despotism. The whole Revolutionary movement remains for her an affair of *ideas;* its epic and heroic aspect, as a great national uprising, culminating in the sanguinary glories of the Empire, escaped her. As has been well suggested, her Swiss-Protestant antecedents (perhaps also her woman's hatred of war) obscured for her this phase of the Revolution and its aftermath.

Despite its limitations, despite the strong anti-Imperial bias which often obscured her judgment of men and events, the *Considerations* is Mme. de Staël's maturest and soundest political utterance, though in originality and general interest it does not equal the book *On Germany.* That a woman and a Frenchwoman should, at the opening of the nineteenth century, have undertaken a complete interpretation of modern Germany, remains one of those anomalies which confront us now and then, as if to prove once more the futility of cut and dried rules and classifications, and of all "pigeon-holing" in general. And though the scope of the book might seem, by this definition, comprehensive enough, yet this is not all. Like the *Germania* of Tacitus, Mme. de Staël's *Germany* is a political pamphlet, designed to teach the French people, shut up as they were in their narrow national pride and complacency, that those two great watchwords of theirs, *Liberty* and *Glory,* had acquired on the other banks of the Rhine, a different but not less pregnant

meaning. It is not surprising, therefore, that among the most brilliant and suggestive chapters of the book are those devoted to the "Spirit of Conversation," and to "Society," and to the "French wit," where, in spite of her judicial tone, every word is aglow with admiration of the genius of her own people.

The work *On Germany* is a remarkable and, on the whole, measurably successful *tour de force,* and though it is not, I suppose, a great book, it could have been written only by a great woman. In the light of subsequent events her characterization of the German people is, of course, inadequate—based upon insufficient knowledge and rash generalization. The book is now little read as a whole and yet its pages abound in just and generous appreciations, incisive criticisms and keen moral insight, as valid today as when they were first penned. And indeed, turn where we may among the writings of the French critics and moralists of the nineteenth century, our eye falls inevitably upon the name and the thoughts of Mme. de Staël—thoughts grave, wise, profound as the utterance of an ancient oracle, illumined sometimes by a lightning flash of intuition that penetrates to the heart of things—with a thrust so keen, an aim so sure, as to have all the effect of inspired vision.

Time is the only just judge. His verdict is always vindicated in the end.

To leave no consummate and immortal literary monument, after a whole life spent in the single-minded service of truth and freedom and beauty!

What harsher sentence could fall upon this aspiring, earnest, ardent spirit, so full of confidence in herself, and in the value and urgency of her message?

And yet let us not rashly pity her. For even setting aside the direct political influence which she exerted in her own time, there is not one of all the men and women, her peers, who lived their full and fruitful lives in those stirring, heart-searching times—not one, I believe, save only the great Emperor himself, who is today as intensely alive in the world as Mme. de Staël.

Her splendid gifts of mind and heart and soul, her rich and interesting career, crowded—not with happiness, but with strenuous endeavour, and noble achievement—stand out on the page of history, a supreme example of the highest reach of feminine accomplishment. And her teachings—her vision of truth, her passion for ideas—perhaps for the very reason that they were never adequately embodied in any great and perfect work, have entered to a remarkable degree into the moral and spiritual life of her people and, through them, have become a part of the intellectual heritage of the world.

No! no frustrate ghost will ever haunt the shady groves of Coppet, nor wander disconsolate amid the windings of the *rue du Bac.* Germaine de Staël has come into her own, and no man—not even the Arch Adversary himself—can pluck it out of her hand.

THE GREAT TRADITION

MADAME DE SÉVIGNÉ

MARIE DE RABUTIN-CHANTAL, Marquise de Sévigné, has been the subject of a voluminous literature. She never wrote a line for print herself, but as soon as her tireless pen was laid aside, her keen eyes—done at last with their ready smiles and tears—closed upon this world, forthwith collectors, editors, biographers, antiquarians seized upon her as their lawful prey, and from her day even until ours the stream of publication has never entirely failed.

The remotest branches of her family before and after her own time—in Brittany, in Burgundy, in Provence; the details of her daily life in sickness and in health; her friends, her children, her theology, her morals—everything that touched her, however remotely, has turned, it would appear, not to gold, but to ink. One of the very few writers who absolutely did not know how to be dull, she has inspired some of the heaviest and dreariest pages even penned, and the long list of volumes on most divergent themes, which bear her name upon their title-pages, might suggest to the uninitiated reader of catalogues and publishers' lists that French science and scholarship would have fared

very ill in the seventeenth century but for the omnipresent succour of the inexhaustible and apparently omniscient Marquise.

Of course, we know very well, on the contrary, that Marie de Rabutin had no more than a ladylike interest in the problems of archæology or medicine, for example, and that her very commonplace cure at Vichy offers no new feature to the student of rheumatic gout. If all these many men of many minds have laid greedy hands upon her name and her prestige, to give currency to their own theories and inventions, it is rather—is it not?—that they all find in this woman a certain power of universal appeal, which makes of her, in a special sense, a representative of her age, her sex, and her country.

It is asserted by a famous historian that no true and adequate portrait of Julius Cæsar, either written, carved, or painted, has been preserved—or probably ever existed. And the explanation suggested is not that the great man was subtle, secretive, mysterious, beyond the common measure of men, but rather that in him the human and masculine qualities were all so evenly developed, so nicely balanced and proportioned, that he was for his contemporaries, and has remained for posterity, rather a type of manhood than an individual man. And such in her smaller scope and degree might have been the lot of Marie de Sévigné. A great Frenchwoman, a great aristocrat, a great writer, a great friend—her individual physiognomy might have remained always a little vague and

blurred, had not this smooth and shining surface been broken by one blessed imperfection, one saving defect. The mother of Françoise de Grignan, blindly partial, doting, often unreasonable, steps down from her niche high up on the classic stairway, and walks with us the common earth, climbing with painful steps the *via dolorosa* appointed for mothers since time began.

The family of the Rabutin-Chantal was of an old but somewhat obscure nobility, not unmixed with bourgeois stock—a mingling of red blood with blue by no means uncommon even then, and not unimportant, by the way, when we come to take account of Marie's robust virtues and plebeian abhorrence of debt. She was born, an only child and an heiress, in 1626, at her father's town residence in Paris, and her life covers three-fourths of the great century.

The four years of the Fronde—the last struggle of the ambitious nobles and the always factious City against the onward sweep of the royal power—were comprised in her short married life. She and her young husband were habitués of Mme. de Rambouillet's blue *salon*, when the *précieuses* were in their glory, making and moulding the speech and manners of France, and long before even Molière had thought of calling them *ridicules*. When she died, the star of the king was sinking with the century. The brilliant, reckless, pleasure-worshipping court had faded to the ghost of itself —a shadowy place, where puppet-like figures, clad in stiffly-gorgeous garments, with faces hypocriti-

cally solemn, went mechanically through the motions and gestures of court ritual, as if already doing penance in another world for the joys and follies of this.

But, happily unaware of the part she was to play, in all the greatness and littleness of her world, Marie de Rabutin passed the years of her childhood in Paris or at a country house nearby, giving no special promise of anything except good looks, good health and buoyant spirits. For her good or evil fortune she was left an orphan at about six years of age, and at ten was placed formally under the guardianship of her maternal uncle, the Abbé de Coulanges, who transferred his young ward to his own estate, the Abbey House at Livry—a charming spot deep-buried in vines and hidden in tall trees, though but a few miles from Paris. Here, pure air, an out-of-door life, and the absence of all undue constraint or excitement made firm the foundations of that soundness of body and mind which were to be not the least precious part of little Marie's dowry. While in the interval the good, if somewhat unclerical Abbé, was taking exceedingly good care of his niece's fortune, buying fertile acres, collecting rents and piling up the bright gold *écus* to be re-invested in safe and lucrative enterprises—making her indeed, irrespective of her personal graces, one of the best *parties* in France.

Nor did he forget or neglect the training of her mind; and here too, whether by chance or intention, the originality of his methods is equalled only by the happiness of their effect. The systematic

education of women is not—has never been, in the French tradition, and in the seventeenth century the orthography and punctuation of even queens and princesses made correspondence with them a painful honour, though as the great ladies rarely opened a book themselves they were not reminded unpleasantly of their own eccentricities of style. But Marie de Rabutin, thanks perhaps to her comparatively modest rank, was destined to receive an instruction uncommonly thorough and comprehensive for any period. To dance and sing and make her *révérences* with grace and elegance—all that was a matter of course, and it was not without precedent that a girl should read romances and revel in the play. But Ménage and Chapelain, the two pedantic and in some ways rather ridiculous tutors of her uncle's choice, made a far more sweeping innovation when they gave this little lady a Latin so sound and sufficient that Tacitus and Vergil were to her always a satisfaction and delight. They added to that the Italian of Tasso, the Spanish of Lope de Vega, and —another lesson also, more precious than all the rest—into this fresh, vigorous and open mind they instilled the love of good books.

For now as ever these three abide—the friendship of men, of nature and of books—three cities of refuge from the dreadful loneliness of the spirit. But living friends alas! have a melancholy fashion of changing and growing cold; and the love of nature, even after a hundred years of Wordsworth —of nature unarranged and uninterpreted—is still the privilege of very few. But the love of books—

is it not the inalienable heritage of all the elect among men? Here in the kingdom of fancy, our friends are ever to our mind; always faithful, never importunate—who bore us not with their egotistical out-pourings, offend us not with untimely criticism and advice! Set free for a season from the stark prison house of flesh, we behold the poet's vision unabashed and communing familiarly with saints and sages we sit in a wise passivity, a salutary silence, and do the great deeds, think the great thoughts of all mankind. Yes, those queer and unromantic pedagogues builded better than they knew for the young Marie, and shall have our gratitude as they had hers. The most extravagant of fairy godmothers could have done no more.

The well-groomed and disciplined seventeenth century Muse could not impart the love of nature, in our modern sense, and yet in some odd, intuitive, unreasoned fashion, Marie de Rabutin was all her life a lover of the woods and streams. The birds sing, the flowers bloom, spring comes and autumn passes, visibly and audibly in many of her letters written at Livry, and I am persuaded that the oldest and tallest of the trees that arch the straight avenues at *Les Rochers* must still be mindful of her familiar presence, as she moved to and fro in their shadow, in joy or sorrow, under sun or moonlight, finding unconsciously in the serene beauty of these mute, insensate things, something of that consolation and relief that were to lie unuttered for another hundred years. From *Les Rochers* she writes, "La Mousse (her secretary) has a cold in his teeth,

the abbé a cold in his knee, and that leaves me free to do what I like in my own park and I like to stroll up and down here in the evening until eight o'clock." And from Livry:

"I have just been at Livry. Alas, my child, how well have I kept my pledge to you; how tenderly and long have my thoughts dwelt upon you! The weather was fine though very cold, but the sun was shining and all the trees were decked forth in pearls and crystals. I strolled about a long time." And again:

"Day before yesterday I went out to Livry all by myself, so that I might wander about there deliciously with the moon; there was no wind. I stayed from six o'clock till midnight and took great satisfaction in this little escapade. I owed this little attention, at least, to the fair Diana, as well as to the lovely Abbey."

And as for friendship—to her who had already so rich a portion, was added this also, a sincere and cordial liking for her fellowmen. Marie de Rabutin's interest in men and women, high and low, great and small, never failed; while for her friends her love was a treasure-house indeed, inexhaustible in faith and patience, loyalty and service, through sickness and health, through good and, especially, through evil report.

Surely never had teachers and guardians a more fertile soil, nor did any reap a fuller and easier harvest from their wise and thrifty planting. By what strange and perverse fortune was it, then, that

all their tact, all their foresight and wisdom deserted these zealous and well-meaning greybeards when, a few years later, the question of her marriage arose? With respect to this dark problem of marriage, the old, long-civilized Latin peoples, like the Orientals, have retained but few illusions, and shocking indeed in their eyes must appear our western temerity which intrusts to the young creatures themselves, in the plenitude of their ignorance, the unrestricted choice of their own life mates! And yet this liberty of ours so little understood by older peoples, so much abused by ourselves, is a heritage, hard won like all the rest through centuries of struggle, and not to be lightly foregone. Not at least until we have more light, not indeed until the weight of evidence against us grows far heavier than it is.

Here at least must be recorded one more signal and quite undisputed failure of the old régime. With a wide range of choice and every advantage of youth, beauty, and fortune, the prize fell promptly and without protest to Henry, Marquis of Sévigné. Handsome, light-hearted and fascinating and of rank higher than her own, this young man might well have charmed the young girl's fancy, had she been free to follow her own will; but he had all the faults of his age and position, without even the countervailing grace of a hearty affection for his bride— "He loved often and indiscriminately," writes Marie's sharp-tongued cousin Bussy, "but never by any chance any one so lovable as

his wife." And—a worse sin against her, from a contemporary standpoint—he wasted her substance in riotous living.

Of the eight years of the Sévignés' married life we know little—surprisingly little when we recall how much we know of the wife's later career. Strange—is it not? that she, past mistress as she was already of easy and vivacious narrative, pathetic or humorous description, should have left us no pages of "heart-history"—no journal, confession or confidential correspondence to light up these silent years! Think to what account Jane Carlyle or Marie Bashkirtseff would have turned the situation! But no! in this old-fashioned seventeenth century an unwritten law still enjoined a certain reserve, a measure of reticence—of outward deference at least to the family name and honour, however unworthy such forbearance its temporary representatives might be.

But we do know at least that in these unrecorded years something very important happened to Mme. de Sévigné—there were born to her a daughter and a son. The son, Charles, at *Les Rochers,* the Sévigné home in Brittany, the daughter, Françoise Marguerite, a year or two earlier, though, oddly enough, neither the place nor the date of this capital event has ever been ascertained. And then, in 1651, just in time perhaps to rescue his image from complete defacement in his wife's memory, the Marquis de Sévigné was killed—in a duel—and in a quarrel as trivial and fantastic as his whole career.

Peace to his ashes! He was a poor, slight creature. A figure of too gallant an outside, perhaps, to be quite disdained, and too unsubstantial to arouse our wrath, he had yet brought to his wife the deepest and sweetest experiences of life. He left her embarrassed indeed in fortune, so that years of retrenchment and economy and infinite calculations on the part of the good old Abbé were needed to rebuild her inheritance, but rich in the treasures of maternal love which was thereafter to absorb all the energies of her soul.

Mme. de Sévigné had been fond of her husband —had, like many other women, felt the power of his charm; but her grief for his loss was, one may believe, tempered by a sense of relief that his reckless and selfish career had stopped short of ruin and dishonour. Moreover, her resolve to make no second marriage venture—to run no further risks with the life and the fortune to which her children had now the strongest claim—this decision, so widely canvassed in her day, was promptly and cheerfully taken, and adhered to without serious violence to her feelings or desires. For this woman's nature, so variously and bounteously endowed, was not without its Arctic zone—a region where the sun might glisten with illusory brightness, but the ice never melted—even under the fierce ardours of besieging suitors' attacks. And perhaps after all there *was* the sting of truth in Bussy's malicious jibe, when he insinuated that his cousin's irreproachable conduct and spotless reputation would have been more admirable still had they not been

made unduly easy by a sluggish temperament and a cold heart. But this was a hard-saying and Bussy had to take it back on his knees. Bussy, no doubt, was jealous as well as spiteful, for both as wife and widow Marie de Rabutin had many adorers; Bussy himself, of course, Cardinal Retz, the Chancellor Fouqué, the great Turenne, and other famous names besides, concerning whom, after mature reflection, I am fain to conclude that she was nevertheless better free of them all. The love they offered her—so casually lavish—was not worth even one of her ready tears.

And so the treasure of her heart, love and tears beyond counting, was reserved for Françoise; for from the first Mme. de Sévigné discriminated between her children. She made apparently no effort after maternal impartiality, and the usual rôles of son and daughter seem here to have been oddly reversed. Charles was a delightful fellow, of an infinite tact and delicacy and firmly convinced of his sister's better right to all the good things of life—including their mother's love. In health he was a genial, spirited, most entertaining companion, with a love of books as strong as hers, and a critical judgment far more invariably right; in sickness a skilful, devoted and sympathetic nurse. And yet his mother (who perhaps knew him better than we, after all,) had always a difficulty in taking him seriously in any relation. Even his dissipation, his many light loves, cannot be said to have troubled her peace of mind half so much as the fading roses on her daughter's cheek, or the uncertain,

often receding dates of her returns to Paris. When the young man's health gave way—a result, in part, of the hardships and exposures of his military campaigns, but largely also of the life of disorder he had lived—Mme. de Sévigné was grieved, anxious, affectionate, but always with a sort of ironical detachment—a half-indulgent disdain, very *very* different from the passion of whole hearted tenderness which met and responded to every change of mood in her idolized Françoise. It was the age of absolute monarchy and this daughter reigned to the end with undisputed sway over her mother's heart and life.

"My son left us yesterday (she writes from Les Rochers) extremely sorry to go. There is nothing good, nothing upright, nothing noble that I do not seek to inspire or confirm in his heart. With sweetness and acquiescence he responds to all I say—but you know the weakness of human nature. And so I can only put my trust in Providence and cherish the consoling thought that I have no cause for self-reproach so far as he is concerned." One wonders if she did really merit such consolation.

At Françoise one cannot always look through her mother's eyes—indeed one is conscious of a somewhat perverse impulse to seek a less rose-hued medium. She grew up under the maternal wing, an uncommonly handsome, clever and accomplished girl, though always somewhat reserved and moody —to this we have abundant testimony, not Mme. de Sévigné's by the way, and not Bussy's, always to be discounted when his words were meant for the

mother's eyes or ears. When at the age of fifteen Mlle. de Sévigné made her formal débût at court, she created a real sensation—and elicited from one courtly witness the ominous tribute, "Here is a beauty that will set the world on fire."

Matre pulchra filia pulchrior, as she was, Françoise de Sévigné's first formal *réverénce* at St. Germain was followed by all sorts of brilliant fêtes, masques, and ballets in which her rôle, both as beauty and as accomplished dancer, was conspicuous and flattering. It was a youthful court and had not yet lost its spontaneous gaiety and lightness of heart; corrupt already, no doubt, but far less callous and stereotyped in its sins than it was afterwards to become. Louis himself was but twenty-three and recently married to a girlish queen, toward whom he maintained as yet all the forms of gallant devotion; while for another, fairer still, he reserved his sincerer and tenderer observances. The lovely Louise de la Vallière was not yet officially the King's mistress, and the little haze of romance that still lingered, we are told, around the royal wooing, gave a certain morning charm, almost like that of innocence, to all their elaborate merry-makings—a sort of carnival of youth and love and joy, offered by the lover to his beloved.

Ah! in 1660, it was worth while to be young and noble! worth while even being packed into most insufficient and comfortless quarters in the old, still unmodernized palace of Versailles. For in those days Molière was directing the production of his own plays and Lulli overseeing the musical inter-

ludes and ballets of his own composition; and who knows?—it might have been the incomparable good fortune of some of us to assist, on one of these glorious evenings, with the other exalted guests—at the first performance of *Tartuffe!* To Mme. de Sévigné, as to thousands of other French men and women, this might well seem the crowning moment of all time, and she may be excused, I think, for a certain motherly pride and exultation—keener and more naïve in her, we may be sure, than any emotion which stirred the tranquil breast of Françoise—to find her idolized daughter of this most brilliant group. For in spite of her brilliant beauty and substantial dowry, Mlle. de Sévigné was little sought in marriage. Two or three candidates, possible if not brilliant, must be rejected, and when the Count de Grignan—twice a widower and by no means a youthful Adonis, at last presented himself, one cannot resist the impression that mother and daughter held out welcoming hands to him as to a deliverer. Françoise was handsome, she was even beautiful no doubt, but of that inward grace of which beauty—to be effective, to be really successful indeed—must be but the outward and visible sign—of that magical quality which we call charm, this daughter of the most charming of women had not a trace.

The marriage was showy rather than safe after all, for de Grignan though of a distinguished family was not rich and his fortune was subject to the exorbitant demands of his official position, as Lieutenant Governor of Languedoc, as well as to his

own love of display. But mother and daughter were prepared to make the best of his situation as of himself, and exert all their influence to secure for him a promotion in the form of some office at Court. His actual appointment to the Lieutenant Governorship of Provence, with the duty of residing in his province, was not made public till some time after the marriage, and to the older woman at least, was an overwhelming blow. There was no help for it—the parting of the ways was at hand.

Eighteen months had elapsed meanwhile, and it was not until after the birth of her first daughter, unwelcome, unloved little Marie-Blanche, that Mme. de Grignan, with mingled feelings no doubt, compounded of relief at escaping from her mother's too watchful, too absorbing and demonstrative love and care, and a certain vague remorse and regret at leaving that mother disconsolate, actually set out to follow her husband to their distant home. It is a journey that can now be accomplished in about twelve hours, but required at least as many days in the seventeenth century and was fraught with perils and pitfalls by land and water, which Mme. de Sévigné's letters make thrilling indeed. It is hard to realize that the Rhone now flowing so tamely beneath a hundred stalwart bridges and between cultivated and populous shores should ever have been the source of such terror and anguish as it inspired in Mme. de Sévigné during Françoise's first journey to Provence. She speaks of this decorous stream with something of that helpless awe

and horror which are now-a-days reserved for the incalculable moods of the sea.

And now at forty-five, the great active occupation and interest of her life consummated, Mme. de Sévigné's career may be said to begin. Of course she was no novice in letter-writing; her long if irregular intercourse with de Bussy, her letters to her cousins the Coulanges, to Mme. de Lafayette, and to others also, show her already in full possession of her talent. But these letters, these correspondents were, all except Bussy, episodic and by the way. Not till she lost her idol did the need of self expression become urgent. Henceforth, and for twenty-five years, with the intervals of her visits to the Grignans and their sojourn in Paris, the tide of mother love and longing set steadily toward the arid, wind swept plains of Provence and the stern and stately halls which sheltered and imprisoned her Countess, together with all the patriarchal tribe of Grignans, small and great.

"My child, love me always, it is my life, my soul, this love of yours; I told you so the other day; it is this that makes all my joy and all my sorrows —I confess that the rest of my life is veiled in darkness and sorrow when I remember how much of it must be passed far from you."

And again: "If I had mourned for my sins as much as I have mourned for you since I have been here, I should be in a favourable state for the joyful Easter Season. . . . It is a strange thing, a vivid imagination which pictures everything as

if it still were as it used to be; and then one thinks of the present and when one has a heart like mine —one is like to die of the contrast. I don't know how to escape from you. Our house in Paris crushes me more and more each day, and Livry adds the last straw!"

The woman revealed—one might almost say, exposed to us in these letters—was not—was never supposed to be a candidate for sainthood. Perhaps the only great quality which she possessed in common with the most eminent saints—St. Teresa, for example, and St. Francis—was her broad and tolerant humour with its accompanying capacity to adapt herself to all sorts of people and situations, and to make the best of that irrepressible human nature—of which, by the way, neither she nor the saints had too high an opinion.

But all manner of follies and frailties linger in this buoyant and many-sided nature. Hers, for example, is the cheerful hardness of heart—the serene disregard of all classes except her own, which made the lot of the noble under the old régime so comfortable and so perilous. Of all *classes,* I say, for in her relation to individuals, servants, dependents, inferiors—even animals, she seems to have been indulgent and kind to the point of soft-heartedness, and it is certain from many allusions that she was well loved and served faithfully all her life. In all feminine arts and wiles moreover—long since denied and disavowed, if not entirely renounced, by the modern woman, Mme. de Sévigné is quite openly and joyously expert. Wit-

ness, for example, her frequent epistolary skirmishes with Bussy whom, undoubtedly, she irritated and provoked with a zest only less keen than her pleasure in the ensuing reconciliation. She is indeed an adept in the flatterer's art, though she practises it not upon the hostile or indifferent, but only upon those whom she loves well enough to make the effort to please worth while. And if she lacked sometimes the charity that thinketh—and speaketh, no evil, it is impossible to treat with rigour a failing to which are due such pen-pictures as those of Mlle. du Plessis and the fine ladies of Vitré, and all the rest of the portrait gallery made immortal by her delicious mockery. And, in further extenuation, it must be said that the evil she imputes is never of her own invention. "I hate and detest false news" is her frequent asseveration, and far more uniformly than any other writer of letters, memoirs, or journal, of her day, Mme. de Sévigné looks at the life around her with the clear, sane, kindly eyes of a sympathetic contemporary—penetrating but without rancour, and without personal ends to warp her judgment.

It is perhaps, after all, her *esprit gaulois* that puts the severest strain upon the taste of a fastidious generation—and especially of its feminine half. It is futile to deny or belittle this vein. Mme. de Sévigné, like Bussy, like Molière, dearly loved a *risqué* anecdote, a broad and salacious jest. I doubt if even her most scientific modern editors would venture upon an unexpurgated edition of her works for popular use. But—again by way of apol-

ogy—hers was an age of incredible freedom of expression. The Hôtel de Rambouillet had done much toward refining both manners and language, but the familiar speech among the highest class, like the stairways and corridors of their noblest palaces, still harboured many an unclean thing. And those Rabelaisian episodes (few and brief after all) which drop sometimes from her pen, won uproarious applause from her contemporaries, and the easy pardon of even her modern French critics—the serious, low-spirited, modern Gaul having yet this trait in common with his fathers. And above all and through all, she is always interesting because she is always *alive*. This dead-and-gone old world of hers springs to life under her touch as irresistibly as the young grass follows the drawing of the April sun. She has often to speak of commonplace, even sordid matters, in veiled and cryptic phrases, and of people, events and things to modern ears remote and strange. She must even sometimes repeat the same tale to different correspondents—yet we follow on—puzzled, often disappointed, and sometimes even shocked; but never, *never* bored.

In one letter she overflows in complaint, tender reproach, and lamentation over the slowness and uncertainty of the post—her own intolerable anguish and suspense in waiting for news from Provence, and though we are assured of the result, yet we read on, conscious each time of a thrill of relief when we hear that the letters have arrived—the wished for tidings been received. We are watching

too—as eagerly almost as poor Françoise from her castle towers of Grignan, for the glitter of some precious nugget of court news—the latest exploit, perhaps, of the king's ponderous, slow-moving armies—which for all their splendid feats of individual daring and heroic leadership, seem in many of their methods to belong to the same school of warfare as the siege of Troy. Or again, she flashes before the eager eye of the reader some delicate vignette after Watteau or Boucher—an intimate scene from royal antechamber or boudoir, or a tragi-comic episode from banquet-hall or ballroom where the king, in the glory of brocade, jewelled buckles and curled wig offers his hand for the dance to some lovely nymph, whose coming greatness is reflected in his ardent eyes as well as in the ill-disguised chagrin of the reigning favourite and her unofficial court.

And so the years go by, the leaves are turned, one volume takes the place of another. It is no longer the young king nor the young court. There are pages of this chronicle that are like a solemn roll-call of the dead. Turenne, the great Condé, Cardinal Retz, La Rochefoucauld, Mme. de Lafayette—and for one and all she has a fitting word—of farewell, of praise, of judgment—perhaps only of dismissal—from this scene of their earthly triumph or defeat to that other tribunal, where neither power nor rank, beauty nor influence can avail or profit any more. And at the end—the last leaf turned, the last volume laid aside,—having read in all likelihood, the last lines Marie de Rabutin ever

wrote, suddenly one comes to himself, as it were, with a start—realizing that he has so lived in her life that when at last she is gone, he has grown old and wise with her years and her wisdom, and this world of her experience has become as real and vital as his own, and far more interesting.

In 1690, her debts paid, her affairs in order at last, Mme. de Sévigné took up her abode at Grignan and there she lived—with rare intervals in Paris—for six years—in close companionship with her daughter and the young Pauline de Grignan, and in a happiness as complete as her vivid imagination, her anxious and tender heart were capable of enjoying on earth. Little rubs there were still no doubt in their daily intercourse—Françoise was still herself and it was not in her fully to satisfy her mother's absorbing love—nevertheless, these years together were surely the best that life had to offer them both. With the flight of time too it is easy to discern that both have changed, the daughter growing gentler, more reasonable, with a clearer understanding of this great affection that from her birth had enwrapped her like an atmosphere—like an atmosphere too subject to alternations of cloud and sunshine. And the mother, who could not grow more loving, seems to have made a study of moderation and self restraint. You see they were both growing older and they had both known sorrow, disappointment and ingratitude.

The truth seems to be that none of the Sévignés were good courtiers. Charles retired at an early age from the court and from the service, where,

more or less by his own fault, promotion was for him clearly unattainable. He married a young girl of Brittany who had never been beyond her province, and settled himself at Les Rochers to lead the life of a cultivated, unambitious country gentleman. Mme. de Sévigné herself was always well received at Court where she made periodic appearances and had many warm admirers. But she was openly and consistently faithful to old friends, even those marked with the stigma of royal displeasure, and—worse yet!—she was never able to regard with becoming seriousness the long line of court beauties who succeeded one another so swiftly in the king's favour. She actually allowed herself occasionally a jest at their expense, discreet, but unmistakable, and if certain of her letters were opened and read by the police (as she sometimes suggests that they were) the persistent ill luck of herself and her children may perhaps be partly explained.

Something of the sadness—a little also of the peace and detachment of age are upon this woman. She speaks often of death and of those last things of whose verity and supreme importance no doubt seems ever to have crossed her mind, though she remained (she never could quite understand why) to the end of her life a sincere but only moderately devout Christian and Catholic. The austerity of Mme. de Lafayette's later years were to Mme. de Sévigné admirable—worthy of all emulation—but quite beyond the range of her sober common sense, as of her tenacious affections—still passionately

anchored to the earth. It was but fitting then that her last days should be spent at Grignan, honoured, cherished, beloved, almost to her heart's content. It was fitting also that she should die and be buried there, and it really matters little that the nature of her last illness is still uncertain, or even that Mme. de Grignan, herself dangerously ill, should have been absent from her dying bed. Mother and daughter understood one another fully at last, and certainly one could do no greater despite to this great maternal spirit than by ascribing to her beloved daughter petty motives, unworthy fears, cowardly scruples in this great and final emergency. Mme. de Grignan was always a great lady and *noblesse oblige.*

Among so many fallen or tottering literary idols, it is pleasant to find Mme. de Sévigné's fame quite solid and intact after more than two hundred years. As a writer of familiar letters she still holds the first place. More unstudied, vivid, and picturesque than Cicero—her only rival among the ancients, she is more convincingly sincere than Voltaire, and as much more interesting than the charming but unfortunate Cowper, as the France of Louis XIV is more interesting than the England of George III. Few and obscure then are the French critics or historians of literature, who have not felt it due to their own glory, if not to hers, to attempt some sort of appreciation of Mme. de Sévigné's personality and talent. And yet—from her contemporary de Bussy, the cocksure, to the cordial but slightly con-

descending Ste.-Beuve and the dogmatic M. Faguet —not one of them, to my mind, has achieved a characterization entirely adequate and satisfying. Intensely of her own time, she is almost equally of ours—not only in her literary style, but in her thoughts and feelings, her attitude toward life—even to the little fads and fancies which make so large a part of civilized woman's world. And concerning this unequalled *modernness* of Mme. de Sévigné, the last word, I am persuaded, is yet to speak. Truly all the ends of the earth were come upon this woman. She stood at the very heart and centre of the civilized world and before her eyes the pageant of humanity in little unrolled itself day by day; while, by a happy gift of Destiny, she had in herself the seeing eye, the understanding mind, the loving heart.

The French language of her time, moreover, already so much subtler, more polished and delicate than any contemporary tongue, offered her an instrument admirably fitted to her use, and in the literary traditions and standards forming visibly around her, she found an ideal of both form and substance—a mould which restrained and fortified her flexible, exuberant genius. It is more than doubtful whether in any other language, or even in France at any other period, a correspondence so voluminous, so unstudied, so intimate as hers, could have possessed both the high literary quality and the human charm and interest which make Mme. de Sévigné's letters perennially fresh and young. And finally the outward stimulus was not

lacking. The creature she loved best in the world, intercourse with whom was to her the very breath of life, was withdrawn from her by a distance of five hundred miles. Henceforth into her letters to her daughter Mme. de Sévigné wrote *herself*.

And this habit of complete self-expression and expansion, grew no doubt by long indulgence as did also her unfailing sense of form, the infinite variety of phrasing, the freedom and flexibility of movement, and the marvellous verbal felicity which must always be the despair of her imitators. And sometimes when this light and facile pen of hers encounters a great theme—some tragic history of death, defeat, dishonour—suddenly in the grasp of a great emotion, her period swells like that of Bossuet into a solemn, majestic funeral chant; or with La Bruyère, her irony, light and swift and deadly, searches the heart of hypocrisy, servility and greed. Not often though—this latter strain. Very rarely do the mystery and mockery of life disturb her naïve and womanly faith, and wring from her such a cry from the depths as this: "You ask me, my dear child, if I still cling to life, and I must own to you that in spite of all the fiery trials through which we must pass here, I still find myself unreconciled to death. I deem myself so wretched to be forced to conclude the one experience by the other, that I suppose if I could go back and begin life again, I should be glad of the chance. I am launched upon an enterprise which I know not how to conduct, embarked upon life without my own consent, and yet though I know I must soon make an end of it

all, that very knowledge cuts me to the heart. What, after all, will my end be? By what door shall I go out? Shall I suffer a thousand dreadful pains, so that my last hours shall be dark with despair? How shall I stand before God? What shall I have to show him? Shall I wait for the hour of terror, or my utmost need, before I draw nigh to my Maker? . . . What have I to hope? What to fear? Am I worthy of Heaven? Have I deserved Hell? Indeed, death appears to me so dreadful, that I cry out upon life, rather that it is the road toward death, than because of the terrors with which it is strewn."

Here, at least, is no shallow optimism, no careless and frivolous spirit. This woman did not ignore the great gulf that yawned beside her narrow road. Only, it was in her happy temper to look longest and most often at the flowers that grew along the margin of the abyss, at the sunshine that gilded the sharp-edged rocks—above all at the men and women who, coming by many devious ways and on many different errands, all found themselves at last on the same highway, bound toward the same inevitable end.

. . . . . .

And so it would appear that those dry-as-dust scholars, doctors, and antiquarians were not without a fair share of astuteness and worldly wisdom when, borrowing Marie de Sévigné's name and prestige, they gave, at least for the moment, a certain savour to their musty treatises and monographs. Her real connection with their subjects

might be remote indeed, but her name, written across their title-pages, does sometimes, like a golden Bible text prefacing the sermon of a dull preacher, put life into those sluggish brains and tip their leaden pens with fire.

Two hundred years! It is a long perspective—long enough to dispel all glamour and leave the critic's gaze quite keen and cold. If Mme. de Sévigné does still withstand the ordeal of modern criticism and analysis, it must be, I think, because her work—one and indivisible in spite of its variety—is at the same time in complete harmony with herself. For in its essentials human nature changes little from age to age; it is only the fashion of this world that passeth away. Mme. de Sévigné's letters are simply the fullest, most spontaneous, and inevitable expression of her beautiful and beneficent nature.

For the most part the story of human achievement is written in blood and tears. It is a record of conflict—of difficult self-mastery and resolute repression and subordination of competing motives and impulses in the path of the ruling passion or purpose. Often the complete evolution of the special faculty or talent has implied the maiming of the human creature who has plucked out the right eye, cut off the right hand, in the process. But in Marie de Rabutin-Chantal, Marquise de Sévigné, we are invited, it would seem, to contemplate an exception to this rule. Her talent flowered in an age and a civilization to all intents as remote from ours as those of Greece, and yet her work remains

a legacy of joy to many generations, blooming with undimmed lustre, across the centuries. A legacy of joy, and perhaps a parable also, in which, if she interpret it aright, may lie a hint of admonition to our strenuous modern woman, with her elaborate program of work and play, her too insistent claim for recognition, her slightly strident protest against the injustice and indifference of mankind.

To Marie de Rabutin, at least, literary excellence, literary glory, came not as the reward of painful effort, of laborious days and sleepless nights. She simply lived; and all the years that ripened and sweetened her nature and enriched her experience did, by the same mysterious process, develop her powers of expression. Her gifts of insight and sympathy, of humour and emotion, grew ever toward a completeness in which the woman's personality and her genius were blended into a harmonious whole as inseparable as the colour and fragrance of the lilies of the field. And these, it is said, toil not, neither do they spin, yet they unfold into a perfectness of beauty to which even Solomon in all his glory could not attain.

THE RIDDLE OF THE SPHINX

MME. DE LAFAYETTE

THE Gallic love of system, of regularity, of logical order and consistency has made strange havoc sometimes, it would seem, with another characteristic note of the Latin mind—its clear vision of truth, I mean—its high passion for her—pursued at any cost and held against the world. There is, for example, a school of modern biographers in which hero worship, reverence for great men, takes the watchword, conformity to type. To these interpreters of genius the object of first concern is to preserve intact the legendary features of the hero, the official and consecrated lights and shadows of his life and character. To this end they do not scruple to force reluctant facts into line, fill in the hollows, make smooth the rough places, until by much padding and propping perhaps, the finished figure emerges, classic in outline, heroic in size, only—unluckily, a graven image not a man.

But this quest of an all-inclusive formula, a key which will unlock all doors, is a thankless task after all. There always have been, always will be, no doubt, human documents which all the critic's lore will not avail to decipher, riddles which tax his powers of divination in vain. And it is among these (her protesting biographers to the contrary

MME. DE LAFAYETTE

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notwithstanding) that we must number Marie Pioche de la Vergne, Comtesse de Lafayette, better known even yet as the author of the *Princesse de Clèves.*

The literary world has renewed its interest in this lady within recent years, though the distinguished scholars who have reviewed and reconsidered her work and her life are by no means of one mind with regard to either, and we cannot resist the impression that some of them, in their desire to harmonize, to reconcile all the complex phenomena of her character and career, brought to light by modern research, have omitted some significant details, ignored some plausible evidence, and, in general, given always the most favourable colour and interpretation to words, actions and situations that did by no means always justify themselves. At all events the effect of the more recent studies of Mme. de Lafayette is distinctly that of systematic apology—of all methods the most certain to excite suspicion.

Decidedly, they all protest too much. Let us rather leave Marie de la Vergne to defend herself! Her apology, if so be that she needs one, must emerge from a deeper knowledge of her nature, its resources—its limitations, its temptations. The smoothness of surface which her loyal advocates would produce or perpetuate must have always something fictitious and artificial in its texture. Amidst all this argument and explanation we lose too often the illusion of reality—of life—of which the essence is variety, flexibility and change.

Marie Madeleine Pioche de la Vergne, born in Paris in 1684, was (luckily all are agreed on this point) of a nobility so minute as to be scarcely worth recording in the chronicle of her life. Her father with the title of *écuyer* was in the service of a nobleman of high rank and died while his daughter was still a mere child. And when Marie was about sixteen, her mother, taking, for perhaps the only time in her life, the course of prudence and wisdom, married the Chevalier Renaud de Sévigné, and thus brought her daughter with her into a family of real dignity and distinction. This may not be precisely the sort of benefit for which one would choose to be grateful to a parent, but this young girl was well content, no doubt, to owe no less equivocal service to a mother whose good looks and good humour were scant compensation for her proverbial lack of sense and discretion.

It is, I believe, an unwritten law of romance—if not also of life—that a heroine shall either be left an orphan at a tender age, or shall be afflicted with a mother decidedly worse than none—a monster of perversity or folly or both. The rank of heroine implies, as is well known, difficulties overcome, temptations resisted, villainy foiled, or at the least, oppression, injustice and persecution endured with triumphant constancy and patience. And any young woman, however beautiful, gifted and virtuous, must be fatally handicapped for a heroic career, by the possession of a good mother—wise, strong, tender, whose example and precept make goodness easy and pleasant, while her protecting,

reassuring presence quickly reduces the tempter's arts and devices to the rank of mere old-wives' fables.

If we accept this criterion, Marie Madeleine was a heroine by right of birth. From her mother indeed she had no other advantage either of training or inheritance, and she seems early to have learned to rely on her own inner stores. In spite of some flattering verses inscribed to mother and daughter, by more or less interested provincial poetasters, the young girl did not fall heir even to her mother's beauty. Neither fortune nor fascination was hers and her social position, even at its best, was so unstable as to be painfully subject to circumstance and accident. It was all to her credit then that, with frankness and courage and without useless self-pity, she should confront the unlovely facts, recognizing that since she desired an assured and honourable place in the world (and her ambition was not less keen for being always sober in its manifestations) she must make it for herself.

As for her education, she probably chose both her own teachers and her own course of study, though at that time Ménage, the courtly poet and scholar, was so fashionable a personage in the literary world and especially in the salons of the *précieuses*, that we have only to congratulate this, the second distinguished and gifted pupil of his, when she succeeded Marie de Rabutin, Marquise de Sévigné, in his instructions as in his regard. Ménage, by the way, must have been an admirable teacher. Not only did he arouse the enthusiasm of

his students and stimulate their ambition, but he actually *made them think*, and how hard a task that is, perhaps only the members of a modern college faculty are in a position to estimate. Indeed, except for his harmless, but very unprofessional habit of philandering, he would have been, in many ways, an ideal professor for a woman's college—where, as we know, a rare combination of qualities is required.

Marie de la Vergne was an apt pupil. She had the advantage over most undergraduates in knowing exactly what she wanted and how much of the offered curriculum would repay the effort needed to acquire it. It was her graceful and feminine way to decry and belittle her own attainments, but, modesty aside, it is quite evident that in some manner she contrived (and in a very short time, too) to penetrate to the heart of the Latin poets, and to have her own reasoned preferences—to rejoice in Vergil and Horace and to contemn Cicero's solemn platitudes. What she did not want she rejected without ceremony, and no amount of persuasion or flattery could prevail upon her to add Hebrew to her repertory. For the sort of career to which she was already looking, neither the name nor the training of a *femme savante* would have contributed anything save embarrassment.

Meanwhile, in the midst of her studies and of the friendships which very early she began to cultivate, Marie de la Vergne was growing into womanhood, and as her ideal of life was that of the normal

woman, the problem of her own marriage interested and preoccupied her beyond all others. If her position had not been so anomalous—if she had not been already past twenty-two, and suitors slow to present themselves for a portionless girl, it is probable that the Comte de Lafayette, with all his advantages of rank and wealth, would not have been the husband of her choice. He was at least, a willing, if not an ardent suitor; perhaps he may have found a certain fascination in the complexity of a nature so different from his own. He held an important post in the military service of the king, and immediately after their marriage he took his young wife to the seat of his command in Auvergne, where the couple lived for several years. Two sons were born to them and so far as external peace and harmony are concerned Marie de Lafayette might be counted among the fortunate. The count is described as an honourable and amiable person, though rather dull—characteristics not so unusual, after all, as to require a special dispensation to deal with them. But suddenly, without warning or explanation, a silence falls around this gentleman's name and person—a silence quite unique in history. He simply drops out—his figure vanishes from correspondence and chronicle so entirely, so peacefully, and so respectably, that one can scarcely help resenting as a piece of impertinence, the recent discovery by some officious hunter of documents, of the record of his death in 1683!—after a married life of twenty-eight years! and at

least twenty years later than the date which decorum and good taste would have suggested as the psychological moment for his final exit!

The experiences of Jane Carlyle, Lady Byron and other well known ladies, have enlightened the world pretty thoroughly as to the lot of great men's wives; the other side of the shield—that which depicts the fortunes of great women's husbands, awaits revelation. So far as we can judge, M. de Lafayette chose the better part—simply, tactfully to fade away from view, without complaint or recrimination, accusing journal or confession, leaving the distinguished woman who bore his name, undiminished in credit and greatly increased in worldly goods. Within a few years after her marriage we find Madame de Lafayette again at home in Paris, resuming her social life among that small and delightful group in which were numbered some of the great glories of France. Her two sons have as yet no part in her daily life; though, as they were sons, this was but in accord with the custom of the age and country; the seventeenth century being always in a mad haste to rush its youngsters into manhood, that at the earliest possible moment the awkward boyish fingers might learn to grasp the sword.

And the strangest part of this strange story is that this situation surprised nobody. Every one took Madame de Lafayette's reappearance in Paris, her resumption of her former manner of life, and the absence of her husband, as entirely a matter of course—nobody made any strictures or asked

any impertinent questions. Even Mme. de Sévigné, frankest and least secretive of friends, has never a word, even in her most confidential moments or her most gossipy moods. The conspiracy of silence is unbroken unto this day. But the feeling of deep discomfort and insecurity which this episode excites appears to be a wholly modern sensation—invented perhaps about the same time as the fads for athletic sports, cold baths and ventilation.

The life to which Mme. de Lafayette came back was, in the first place, the elaborate, complicated, passionately frivolous existence of the court. The court of Louis XIV was even in those early days a hotbed of intrigue, of which the king was the centre and the object, and as he was young and, besides all the prestige of his rank, was gifted with a certain share of real charm, most of the plots and counterplots continually weaving around him turned upon love—or at least upon that curious mixture of appetite and ambition, cool calculation and high-flown sentimentality which in those days —and perhaps sometimes in our own—takes love's name in vain. Imagine all these men and women withdrawn from their provincial homes and hence from their normal interests and occupations in life, crowded together in the artificial, fevered, hothouse atmosphere of a palace; with no duties more useful or dignified than the recurrent dressing and undressing of the royal family, or wearisome stations outside royal boudoirs or in royal antechambers, with no ideal or aspiration more lofty than to beguile by insinuation or extort by barefaced beg-

ging some office, preferment, or pension from the king! Hear their servile adulation, witness their abject postures, and then attach to these pitiful figures, one after another of the great names of France—a St. Simon, a Condé, a Rohan, a Longueville. Verily there are few less edifying pictures in all that brilliant spectacular series which we call the History of France!

Into this small world that thought itself so great, Marie de Lafayette made her entrée about 1660 and there what remained of her sentimental education—the sharpening of her perceptions, her mastery of nice distinctions and fine shades, her initiation into the obscure motions and impulses of the heart—was to be accomplished. She was not exactly of the Court circle, but was drawn thither with some regularity by a friendship which we may at first be disposed to find either frivolous or interested, though it was in the circumstances perfectly natural and sincere, and by no means without solid advantage for the future author of the *Princesse de Clèves*. Henrietta of England, better known, in the simple and aristocratic French fashion, as *Madame*, was the daughter of Charles I and after the fall of the English monarchy had taken refuge with her mother in France, where for years they had sounded the depths of poverty and humiliation. This little girl, a mere child when Mme. de Lafayette first knew her in her convent seclusion, was a true Stuart—not beautiful, but with a power of seduction more dangerous than beauty, a sort of natural magic in look and tone and gesture, which

led all hearts captive. Selfish, unstable and fickle as the wind withal, yet with a kind of simplicity—a fund of spontaneous sweetness and childlike gaiety, that disarmed suspicion and made resentment impossible. She was in short a somewhat reduced and expurgated version of her great-grandmother, Mary Queen of Scots, fortunately in a position of less fatal power and responsibility. Mme. de Lafayette was older than the princess by ten years, but the two women drew together by an unreasoned instinct of sympathy, and when Henrietta was withdrawn suddenly from her convent solitude to become the wife of the king's brother, and the centre of a brilliant court, she was prompt to summon her friend to her side, and displayed toward her as long as her own life lasted a sort of caressing affection and confidence of which, even after two hundred years, we still feel the pathetic and appealing charm.

Steadily preoccupied with their ideal image of Mme. de Lafayette, her biographers must needs see in this friendship only the protecting, sheltering regard of an older, more experienced woman for one much younger whose errors and frailties she could not help knowing, whose safety and good name were threatened on every side. But Marie de Lafayette was not one to be swept away by impulse. She had need to hold a prudent course in her life-voyage, and we may take for granted that, besides her real regard for the Princess, she was retained at court by an intense and pardonable intellectual interest in the fortunes of this perverse and wayward

but always lovable creature, and in the dangerous but exciting game she was playing. The Princess' silver and gold she did not covet, she sought neither place nor profit from her exalted acquaintance, but on the other hand, she did not aspire to the rôle of mentor or guardian angel either, and if she had, her courtly career would have met with an untimely check. Madame (perhaps with a vague premonition that she had no time to lose) was bent upon crowding a lifetime of emotional experience into a few brief, brilliant years.

But the end of the play was more sudden and terrible than any one could have foretold, and it may be said of Mme. Henriette with unusual accuracy that nothing in her life became her like the going out of it. Certainly the few pages which terminate Mme. de Lafayette's fragmentary, unequal and otherwise faulty *Mémoires*—pages exquisite in their delicate and unstrained pathos—must have immortalized this unhappy young creature, even if the majestic periods of Bossuet's funeral oration had not set her aloft, once for all, among these favourites of the gods who die young.

All the court and most of the world believed that Madame was poisoned, and certainly there was no dearth of enemies to do the deed, but when we recall how few of our modern ailments had been discovered in the seventeenth century, and how short was the list of maladies by which one could creditably close his earthly account, this theory of poisoning becomes problematic. The Princess may have had appendicitis, or even *cholera morbus*.

The court physicians made no effort at diagnosis; they simply slaked their ghoulish thirst by a copious letting of blood, and the disease pursued its course only a little more rapidly for the treatment.

In the life of Mme. de Lafayette the years between 1660 and 1670 were pivotal years and the time absorbed by the court did not exclude other interests. Her roots had struck deep into the Paris soil, and whether at Versailles and St. Cloud or in her own or her friends' salons, her position was established as a high-bred, elegant, interesting woman, whose discreet wit, fastidious taste and keen insight were the delight of the little group which she admitted to her intimacy, while she was at pains to repel any hint of a professional connection with the world of letters. Kind, gracious and serviceable she was withal, and of such good counsel in practical affairs, that by no means all of those who sought her out came only for the charm of her conversation. Friends and acquaintances, old and new, gathered gladly in her salon in the *rue Férou*—quaintest and narrowest of old-world Paris streets, and even yet so silent that the footfalls of a solitary passer awaken strange echoes behind the high garden walls rising on either side. Besides Mme. de Sévigné, whose friendship was old and tried, there were Ménage, still loyal to his early flame, the Coulanges husband and wife, Mme. de Sévigné's gifted and popular cousins, La Fontaine sometimes, though on a less familiar footing than the rest, and first, last and always La Rochefoucauld, the famous author of the *Maximes*.

This gentleman was the perfect type of the hero under the old régime—the ideal of that feudal France which Louis XIV had come to destroy. Scarred from many hard-fought battles, victor over a hundred hearts, battered, embittered, disillusioned, but—in spite of all—with his power of fascination still formidably intact. They met often in those early days, at the court of Madame, at the country house of a hospitable friend and in the *rue Férou;* and there is little doubt that quite early in their acquaintance the woman's heart surrendered,—went over to the enemy once and for all. For Marie de Lafayette this was the man of destiny —the only one who ever stirred a nature, not wanting in depth but not easily aroused. She was, I believe, a good woman in the strictest sense of the word, and if love found her somewhat late, with youth on the wane and health impaired, it found her also not unarmed. A wife, the mother of two sons, with a reputation for sense and virtue justly earned and justly prized, Time which had robbed her of so much paid all his debts in full, when he brought her the mastery of her own spirit.

In this melancholy duel between two gifted, high-strung, sensitive natures where the strongest and most natural inclination was at war with the most elementary duty, I do not hesitate to give all the credit to the woman. La Rochefoucauld—the husband of an excellent and long-suffering wife and the father of eight children, was quite unused to self-denial in any form. Self-conquest meant nothing even as an ideal to this old fighter of the Fronde,

whose desires had soared to the queen on the throne and who held no princess too high for his wooing. His will was as imperious as ever, and his only vulnerable point was that he was *old*—older in body and in heart than his actual fifty years. Truly it was a pitiful romance—this late, untimely, unfulfilled love of François de La Rochefoucauld and Marie de Lafayette, for which there was no real solution possible on earth. The sort of compromise into which they finally drifted marks the utmost reach of her power and influence over his mind, and it had, like most compromises, the advantage of saving both reality and appearances up to a certain point, so long as they both lived; and the drawback of leaving their good name, and especially hers, at the mercy of speculation and conjecture through all the centuries to come.

Meanwhile I am glad to believe that some joy, some profit came to each of them from the sympathy and companionship of the other. "M. de La Rochefoucauld has divided his wit with me, but I have reformed his heart," wrote Mme. de Lafayette after several years of this recognized and accepted intimacy, and with this as their text many critics have set out to find in the later editions of the *Maximes*, some evidence of a woman's softening mitigating touch. I do not think it is there. An optimistic, charitable, benevolent La Rochefoucauld would have been a La Rochefoucauld deprived of most of his distinction and originality, and singularly diminished in size and prestige. I even question whether such a transformation would

have been agreeable to one who cared, as Marie de Lafayette undoubtedly did, scarcely less for his genius than for his heart. What perhaps she did accomplish in the course of their long, difficult, heart-searching association, was to insinuate into those sweeping, cruel epigrams—and especially into those aimed at her sex—an occasional qualifying clause—a "sometimes" or an "almost" or even a "perhaps," and it may be that these extenuations were more frequent in the man's thoughts than on his pages.

Her influence then upon La Rochefoucauld is so slight as to be almost negligible where his genius or his philosophy is concerned, but on the other hand his share in moulding and developing her mind and her talents is by no means so important as we have been led to suppose. Neither in the subjects of her stories and memoirs, nor in their style, nor in that tone of restrained emotional intensity so characteristic of her best work—does she recall or suggest the author of the *Maximes.* Her wit, humour and even her satire are reserved, with few exceptions, for her familiar letters and her conversation. For an epigram we shall seek in vain through all her best-known works. In none of these ways did her companion's intellect react upon hers; and yet it may very well be that this cynical old *Frondeur* did gradually initiate his intelligent and responsive companion into some of the weakness, meanness and depravity of that human nature for which he had so sovereign a contempt. Certainly the uncanny shrewdness, insight and audacity dis-

played by Mme. de Lafayette in certain secret diplomatic episodes in which she was involved, as well as in the management of her own and other people's practical interests, would be still more unaccountable, if we were forced to leave La Rochefoucauld out of the story.

The period of middle age came earlier in the seventeenth than in the twentieth century, or perhaps it was only that its coming was accepted with more resignation and fewer protesting grimaces than now. When in the early sixties, Mme. de Lafayette was confronted with this new feeling, stronger than her reason or her will, and forced to adjust her life to a new relation, she was at thirty-two no longer a young woman, according to contemporary standards. And from this time, all her life with its sayings, doings and writings, must be seen against this background. As the shadows of physical infirmity grew darker and more menacing to them both, these two storm-beaten fugitives did but draw closer together and farther away from the world. Mme de Sévigné has given them back to us as, going for her frequent and beneficent all-day visits to the *rue Férou*, she used to find them—La Rochefoucauld installed in his great arm chair in the little walled-garden, or, more often as the years went on, in Mme. de Lafayette's spacious chamber, where so many of her painful days were spent. When in 1680 La Rochefoucauld's suffering came to an end with his life, Marie de Lafayette was left in a loneliness of heart and mind for which even her best friends had but scant consolation to offer

her, and in spite of those somewhat artificial interests and occupations with which she tried to fill up the lagging hours, the best part of this woman had certainly passed with him across the "Great Divide."

It is fortunate no doubt that we know not the times nor the seasons, nor have power to set metes and bounds to any career. Otherwise some of Mme. de Lafayette's admirers might be tempted to fix the date of her "going hence" at least a dozen years earlier than it really happened, thus eliminating or minimizing one of the most enigmatical episodes of this apparently uneventful life. Among the questionable relations into which her earlier life at court had brought her, was an intimate and confidential association with the young Princess Marie-Jeanne de Nemours, soon afterward to become the Duchess of Savoy, and to transfer herself, though not the centre of her interests, to her husband's court at Turin. Mme. de Lafayette's long intercourse with this attractive but objectionable person and the sort of activities into which her strong partisan feelings and her natural taste for intrigue gradually led her, have certainly cast a shadow over her fair fame.

A series of letters written by Mme. de Lafayette to the duchess' private secretary and throwing a decidedly unpleasant light upon the whole story, has been discovered in the Turin archives within comparatively recent years; and the sensations of surprise, bewilderment and disapprobation excited by their contents have by no means subsided even

yet. This new Mme. de Lafayette, as hard and unscrupulous, as keen-witted and aggressive in political affairs as she was (or chose to appear) fragile, elusive, delicate and retiring in social and sentimental relations, is so unexpected as to be rather shocking; though a closer study of her letters, of the allusions to her and anecdotes at her expense in contemporary memoirs, should have warned us perhaps to look for this second nature in a person, living in such apparent detachment from the world, whose lawsuits were yet uniformly decided in her favour, whose finances were always flourishing, her sons continually rising in credit and affluence, her favour in the very highest quarters always high and steady without apparent effort or compromise on her own part. The true puzzle is as to which nature was the real—which the essential and fundamental Mme. de Lafayette. And in this connection one cannot help raising the question as to whether, seen in this new light, she had ever deserved the praise bestowed on her by La Rochefoucauld himself, when he called her pre-eminently "*une personne vraie*"—using the epithet for the first time in the sense of *genuine* or *sincere*.

But what La Rochefoucauld had in mind was probably even more an intellectual than a moral quality. If he had been a poet he might have said of her with almost equal justice that "she saw life steadily and saw it whole," as do so few women of any period; and when, with dubious wisdom and still more questionable taste, Marie de Lafayette threw herself heart and soul into the muddy stream

of international politics, in behalf of her royal *protégée*, she had probably few illusions as to that lady's real merits. She elected to plot and scheme, to turn and over-turn, very much as a soldier of fortune may take service under any alien banner, rather for the joy of the hard blows his good right arm can deal, than for either the cause to be served or the glory to be won. Nevertheless this passion for politics, this diplomatic obsession were inborn in this woman. She sought it as an intellectual gymnastic—as an opiate also, it may be, for the bodily pain, the weariness of spirit which her forced inertia must have made sometimes quite unbearable. And, after all, her machinations, her devices for misleading and overreaching the princesses' foes, for cajoling and hoodwinking her friends—they are all rather harmless of themselves, and did harm only because Jeanne de Nemours was a veritable will-o-the-wisp for instability, and—more serious by far—because this habit of indirection in whatever cause acquired, must bring with it a gradual confusion of standards, a recklessness of the means employed, a sure obliteration of the boundaries of truth.

The real difficulty—I repeat—is that we know this woman almost not at all. As soon as we seek to pierce through the polished surface of her outer life, we find ourselves groping among circumstances and conditions foreign to our whole habit of thought, baffling to our preconceived ideals of conduct. We must e'en take her as she is, consoled a little by the thought of her own clear vision turned

inward upon herself as well as outward upon the world. Surely, beneath all her superficial zeal, she must have known that this pulling of wires and moving of puppets was but a game, contrived only to trick the slow hours to a quicker flight, and to give back to her for a moment that sense of life, of vital connection with a world which, in spite of herself, she loved and from which each year she was slipping farther away.

For the pain she strove to forget, pain of body as of mind, would not always be beguiled. There are some lines in one of Mme. de Sévigné's letters which depict with almost gruesome vividness just how formidable was pain in those days when it must be met and borne without attenuation,—without any of those merciful palliatives which modern science has devised. What wonder after all that even in gentle and cultivated minds, the most mediaeval doctrine of Hell found unflinching acceptance and support! Had they not—most of them borne—all of them witnessed, at one time or another, tortures beside which the crude images of the Inferno seemed like twice-told tales? "We came to the conclusion the other day," so runs the letter, "that great physical pain is the only real evil in life. All other troubles depend more or less upon the imagination and upon one's way of looking at things. All other ills have their remedy either in time or in moderation or in strength of mind; they may be mitigated by reflection, by religion or by philosophy. But intense bodily anguish clutches both body and mind. The vision of God

may make us endure it with patience—may even enable us to profit by it, but not even this can rob it of its horrors."

Through this furnace seven times heated for her delicate frame, Marie de Lafayette must take her solitary way for long, long years before she could win her release. After her friend's death, the catalogue of her diseases is recited in full by Mme. de Sévigné and includes nearly every internal malady known to the period, with several invented probably for the emergency—to give excuse for the impotence of her physicians, or to justify the patient's suffering and death. And even this last phase of her career, outwardly so still, inwardly agitated and stormy as ever, is not without its unsolved problems. In these last years, few of her early interests, fewer still of her early pleasures survived. Her interests, (setting aside the diplomatic correspondence already discussed) were the somewhat half-hearted care of her failing health and the preparation for death, which must have taken on more and more the aspect of a delivering angel. Her pleasures were her friendship with Mme. de Sévigné and the satisfactory marriage and establishment of her second son, the elder having entered the church at an early age. She had never been a pious woman. Her acquiescence in the conventional interpretation of catholic dogma must be taken for granted; private judgment in such matters, being in those days an exceedingly hazardous experiment. But Mme. de Sévigné's impulsive invocation of Providence, her childlike trust in the

wisdom and kindness of God, find no echo in the letters of her friend. When in her novels her heroines are hard pressed by temptation within and without, it is always upon their own inner strength, or upon an arm of flesh that they lean. Neither in victory nor in defeat do they have recourse to a higher power.

And yet in her last suffering years, Mme. de Lafayette did turn away from earth. Like many other men and women of her time, she set to work systematically to *make her salvation,* as the phrase went; to this end she enlisted the interest of a famous director of consciences, and as her strength waned, renouncing more and more all other pursuits, she gave herself up to the care of her soul. One or two letters from her spiritual adviser, a certain M. Duguet, have been preserved and they show to our disconcerted modern eyes a type of those famous soul-surgeons, who from time to time have played so large a part in the Catholic France of the old régime. He was a good man and an honest, and well-versed not only in the ways of the great world, but also in the subtleties of human pride and self-deception. It is not for our century to pass judgment upon him. His contemporaries and successive generations of biographers and critics have commended his courage and insight in dealing with this penitent whose peculiar and insidious temptations might have eluded a director less worldly-wise. And yet it is hard to resist the impression of something harsh, impersonal, unsympathetic in this method of his, whose main ob-

ject seems to be to strip away from the quivering, shrinking spirit all that had hitherto made its distinction and prestige, leaving only that elemental humanity, with its miseries, and its weakness, common alike to prince and beggar.

And thus laid bare to her own gaze and to that of her Maker, we must think of Mme. de Lafayette at the last. Her tortured body was granted no respite or relief, but how fared it with her soul the while? Did the tangled web of life straighten itself out to her inner eye as she lay from twilight to twilight, "suspended between Heaven and earth" to use her own words? Ah, we do not know. The door is shut in our faces. Whether her last hour was welcomed only as a relief for racked nerves, or rather as the release of an imprisoned spirit, eager to set out upon its great adventure—we do not know. The rest is silence.

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So small a body of literary work as that left by Mme. de Lafayette has rarely brought lasting fame to any one—especially as the really significant and enduring part of it can be reduced within still narrower limits—to one small volume indeed; the rest being interesting chiefly as 'prentice work is always worthy of attention, when it marks the stages by which the artist has risen to a masterpiece. And that the *Princesse de Clèves* is such an achievement the twentieth century is more fully persuaded than the seventeenth.

In spite of her modest antecedents, Marie de la Vergne, like La Rochefoucauld, held the aristo-

cratic attitude toward literature. They both wrote as the spirit gave them utterance and having spoken were content to be silent. The systematic pursuit of letters as a profession they left to *bourgeois* like Molierè, La Fontaine, or Racine—from whom by the way they did not withhold their cordial admiration and esteem. In spite of her Latin, of that alleged Hebrew she was so quick to disclaim, and of her affiliation with the *précieuses*, Marie de la Vergne was so very far from being a blue stocking that she was not untouched by a certain snobbishness and actually gloried in appearing at least as ignorant as the court ladies among whom she moved. Nevertheless with a certain persistence and steadiness she wrote all her life. There were to begin with the "portraits" of her friends, according to the fashion of the hour, there were her *Memoires of Mme. Henriette*, one short story or novelette and a romance of love and adventure in the old style, though reduced by her good judgment to modest dimensions—all these while she was feeling her way—groping more or less blindly after a form and a manner that should be truly her own. What she found at last was the *Princesse de Clèves*. Once and once only it was given to her to strike a pure, full and perfect note—a note so new and strange and poignantly sweet that after two hundred years the music of it is still in our ears.

We have been told how "Cervantes smiled Spain's chivalry away," and though it would be extravagant to affirm as much of Mme. de Lafayette's slighter more fragile creation, it is yet un-

questionably true that the passing of the absurd and exaggerated romances of her day, with their twenty volumes, their inextricable plots, their super-human adventures and inhuman characters, has been mightily accelerated by this modest little book, confined to one thin volume and to be read easily in an afternoon. Fiction in some form is of course more ancient than history, but the modern novel, or that type of it at least, which depends for interest, not upon events or adventures, but on the realistic portrayal of the inner life, the delicate analysis of motive and sentiment—above all the delineation of passion—this is no older than Mme. de Lafayette and to her belongs without reserve the glory of the initiator. Mme. de Clèves, her heroine, is the first of a long line and I doubt not she would have been wounded in her sensitive pride and reserve, to find how low in the social and moral scale have fallen some of her most authentic descendants. To teach the divine right of passion as a dogma was left for the eighteenth century, but it requires no extraordinary insight to discern the whole doctrine and defence of Julie, of Valentine and Lélia and their less famous modern sisters—latent or implied in the *Princesse de Clèves.*

This little book is written in a manner as novel as its substance—a style dignified, leisurely, slow; the long balanced sentences follow one another with no effort after lightness or variety, yet with a gentle forward-flowing movement not without charm, the very monotony having the effect of heightening the only real interest of the action—

the intense, concentrated, tragic inner life of the protagonists. The events related, setting aside the historical prelude and one or two outside episodes inserted in deference to custom, are of the simplest.

Mme. de Chartres on her appearance at the court of Henry II meets with one or two humiliating rebuffs in her too ambitious matrimonial schemes for her young daughter; but finally accords that daughter's hand to the Prince de Clèves, whose chivalrous fidelity through a period of something very like adversity, has won the mother's confidence, the daughter's esteem and gratitude, though unluckily not her heart. This young girl's attitude toward her mother, toward her betrothed and toward the life that is just opening before her is drawn with the lightest hand, the most consummate skill, as are also the tragic possibilities involved in her unawakened innocence, her docile sweetness, and the veiled emotional intensity which has already touched her youthful beauty with an indefinable melancholy charm.

Neither mother or bridegroom is unaware of the dangerous elements in the situation, yet they do not stay their hands. What French mother or lover ever yet did pause on the threshold for so slight a thing as a girl's heart? The bride is still a bride when the inevitable third appears upon the scene. In the Duc de Nemours, fresh from conquests on battle-fields and in ladies' hearts, we have the far too conventional *jeune premier*—the conquering hero whose essentially cheap and tawdry rôle it was left to the nineteenth century to expose. It is

impossible to apologize for this personage, even yet so dear to a certain class of novelists and playwrights. He is a creature without scruple or remorse—a veritable bird of prey, whose beauty and fascination do but make him the more audacious in pursuit, the more ruthless in possession.

But Mme. de Clèves is no ordinary passive heroine of romance. True she is not proof against the glitter of gold lace, the flash of a jewelled sword-hilt,—still less against the eye and the voice that had learned their power in many another like encounter. Hard pressed she is within and without, her mother's watchful eyes closed in death, her husband, disheartened by her coldness but still unsuspecting, her own heart turned suddenly traitor to her will. But in that soft young bosom—and here the author is striking a fresh and original note—there rings out clear and authoritative a voice to which her well-trained youth has not learned to turn deaf ears:—"Shall I be false to M. de Clèves? shall I be false to myself? Shall I expose myself to the bitter repentance, the intolerable suffering that a love-affair like this would bring upon me?" And the answer is a "no," as unflinching on the aristocratic lips of the sixteenth century princess, as it was to be three hundred years later on those of the intrepid little Yorkshire governess, Jane Eyre.

Jane Eyre, if I remember aright, ran away. To Mme. de Clèves shut in on all sides by the conventional restraints of her position, there was no such refuge. She must stay and confront the enemy within, as well as without, the gates. Tortured al-

most as cruelly by her husband's wilful blindness, his obstinate refusal to remove her from temptation, as by her lover's relentless pursuit, she turns finally upon them both. With a lovely gesture of mingled humility and pride, she throws herself upon her husband's generosity and tells him all.

This scene of the avowal, set in an isolated summer house, at the lonely midnight hour, is the capital one of the book. It brings a revelation of simple childlike trust on the woman's side, of chivalrous tenderness on the man's, and on both of a sorrow as noble, as untouched by any base or selfish passion, as it is profoundly human, and pregnant already with the inevitable tragedy of their fate. From this moment the rôle of the husband steadily rises in pathos and dignity until the lover's frivolous and tawdry personality shrinks and fades into the limbo of the unreal—not substantial enough even to rank as the villain of the piece. No doubt M. de Clèves must die, and as the France of the seventeenth century was unaware of Shakespeare's ultimatum on the subject, Mme. de Lafayette had no scruples in ascribing his death to a broken heart. But he did not die in vain. Into the young wife's final resolution to remain faithful to the dead, not to give herself to the man who had cut short her husband's days and poisoned her own, there entered, I am persuaded, besides her sense of duty, another motive. Her involuntary, half-conscious comparison between the two men and the two loves that had come into her life, could have but one result. It was at the eleventh hour and too late for

happiness, but not too late to vindicate the dignity of the dead man and her own loyalty to the highest when she saw it.

This little book is written with an unfaltering hand. The note of pathos, so easily strained we know, remains pure and true to the end. The friend of Mme. Henriette moves among this company of queens and princes with the unembarrassed ease of one long wonted to a court, whose keen eyes, undazzled by crowns and coronets, look straight through to the pitiful weakness, the sordid miseries of those who wear them. The sureness of her touch upon these fragile and evanescent things may have come to Mme. de Lafayette in those days of silent watchfulness spent at St. Cloud or Versailles, and balanced by the long evenings at home, where with Mme. de Sévigné and La Rochefoucauld she talked far into the night of all things in Heaven and earth in such melancholy wise, that as Mme. de Sévigné wrote to Françoise, they "left no detail undisposed of save their own funerals." But her intimate knowledge of the human heart, of the subtle disintegration wrought by passion in the soul and especially in the soul of a woman—this knowledge came to Marie de Lafayette at first hand. In no sense is the *Princesse de Clèves* an autobiography or a confession; neither characters or incidents are copied from life. The seventeenth century theory of art as well as its tradition of manners, forbade the artist thus crudely to take the public into his confidence or to usurp for his private and personal experience the dignity of universal truth. Nevertheless this

woman knew whereof she spoke. If the story of this lovely and hapless young creature is so moving even yet—if the heart that ached two hundred years ago beneath buckram and brocade is still akin to every woman's heart that beats, it is—it must be—because she who created Mme. de Clèves had passed before her along that steep and stony path of self-conquest and renunciation.

After two hundred years an enigma still. In her lifetime her friends used playfully to call her *le brouillard,* and all the strong light of modern research has not yet dispelled the fog. Something disquieting, something baffling still holds our judgment in suspense, and even in the absence of definite charges, might probably stand in the way of a complete and satisfying vindication.

But there are some charges definite enough. Her equivocal matrimonial relation might be ignored, as in fact her contemporaries ignored it; but what of her incongruous friendship with Jeanne de Nemours? What of that passion for intrigue, which, not content with the skilful manœuvring of her own affairs, must needs reach across the border and try its power among the petty plots and counter-plots of a foreign court? And there is her relation with La Rochefoucauld—upon which all these other anomalies and inconsistencies cast a side-light far from reassuring. And though I am still persuaded that in the narrow and technical sense this relation was innocent, yet it must have involved so many compromises, so many insincerities and concessions, that it is hard to see how, for so many years,

it could walk hand in hand with the highest standard of integrity and moral delicacy.

Yes, the voice of the accuser rises high and shrill and clear, while for the defence the witnesses are neither many nor loud of speech, though, strangely enough, their gentle tones linger longest on the ear and in the heart. Two women rise up to vindicate the memory of Marie de la Vergne, Comtesse de Lafayette, and the former of them speaks with a voice all choked with sobs and her words carry the weight of her own beautiful and irreproachable character, and of her life-long friendship and esteem for the dead. "And so you see," writes Mme. de Sévigné on the very day of Mme. de Lafayette's death, "you see she was right in her death as she was right in her life, and never did she for one moment swerve from that Divine reason which was after all her dominant characteristic." The second witness—a more ethereal form though scarcely less instinct with life, speaks not at all, but turns upon us that lovely face that had been her own undoing, her sad sweet eyes full of a mute appeal—the Princesse de Clèves, child of her imagination, substance of her dreams, pleads in defence of her creator, persuading, convincing that our involuntary leaning toward mercy is more really just than any rigours of pharisaic severity, protesting that in the mind which called into life this incomparable figure, the great ideals of honour, loyalty and good faith were never really desecrated or denied.

And yet we do not know. The master motive, the

ruling passion of this strange spirit, elude our generation as they escaped her own. The key that should unlock all doors breaks in our hand. We must leave Marie de la Vergne as we found her, a mystery.

GREAT WOMEN'S DAUGHTERS

THE early Romanticists took great credit to themselves for having restored to Nature the position of importance and prestige from which mediaeval theology and the cult of reason had cast her down. And yet that great Goddess has still something less than justice at the hands of men, who persist in seeing her, like the usurious creditor in the parable, her heavy hand ready to fall, demanding pitilessly of the weak the uttermost farthing of the debt incurred by the strong. But surely this conception is more romantic than true, and whatever cruelty we seem to find in the Scheme of Things—it is not from Nature that it springs. She is only even-handed, cool-hearted in administering a law she does not make, and as in all our relations we modern mortals are overwhelmingly swayed by sentiment, Nature's large impersonal handling strikes often a heavy blow at our vanity—is accepted under protest—suffered without resignation. Yet the injustice is our own not hers.

When, for example, we think of genius, we are prone to conceive it as in the moment of supreme creative activity and enjoying a bliss to which no other human fruition can be compared, and we forget that these brief and splendid climaxes are followed, too often, by a sort of reaction and collapse,

ALBERTINE DE STAËL, DUCHESSE DE BROGLIE
From the portrait at Coppet.

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seasons of aridity when the spirit faints and all the springs of inspiration run dry. And what is observed of the individual genius, is perhaps equally true of highly gifted families and races of men. The overdraft upon Nature must be paid; the great effort, the splendid but exhausting achievement must be compensated for even at the cost of the second and third generation following. We must witness the premature weakness and weariness, the unexplained disillusion and discouragement of those to whom glory comes as a heritage and not as a reward. They are often footsore and breathless before their course has begun. Their youth must sometimes carry the burden of age, their innocence bear the brand of sins not their own. Cruel? Wanton, do you say? Oh no! Though for the hot and hasty heart of man such justice is harder to bear than caprice.

And sometimes, by a rare anomaly, the genius is a woman and the creature upon whom the weight of her example and influence falls heaviest is a woman also and her daughter. Then the problem takes on a new and subtler interest and demands for its solution a power of intuition and discrimination akin to genius itself. To how much of the mother's endowment shall the daughter fall heir? and to what part of it? How shall she fare in that exceptional environment with which, of necessity or by preference genius surrounds itself? What nurture for heart and brain, what prospects for happiness and goodness will, in such conditions, be hers? For a final and definite answer we may

not hope. But such light as we may be able to throw on the problem can best be sought at one source—in that country where for centuries the power and influence of women have been greatest, their part most fully recognized in the upbuilding of the completest civilization of modern times.

In France and in France only shall we find a *tradition* of famous women. Here and there from time to time in other lands a woman of genius has appeared, fulfilled her appointed task and died, leaving a more or less solid achievement in science, letters or art. But set in no framework of history, with no background of custom or precedent, she has lacked the charm of perspective as well as the substantial dignity and prestige—the birthright of that slender chain of distinguished French women, beginning with Marguerite of Navarre in the sixteenth century and extending to Arvède Barine in the twentieth, which is one of the unique glories of France.

And looking down the line of those whose fame has endured substantially undimmed to our own day, I find three and three only who have possessed among all their other gifts of nature and fortune, each a daughter—a girl, whose identity of sex added to her inherited resemblance to her mother, makes of her, irrespective of her individual characteristics, a personage of no ordinary interest and significance. The sons of these women grew up average men—neither better nor worse than their fellows; but the girls were different. Each of them drew from her mother a well-marked and decided

personality. Each grew up by her mother's side or and though they differed from one another in almost every conceivable way, these three daughters had one feature in common: Françoise Marguerite de Sévigné, Comtesse de Grignan, Albertine de Staël, Duchesse de Broglie, neither more nor less than Solange Dudevant Sand, Mme. Clésinger. For each of them love and loyalty to her famous mother were the strongest feelings of her heart; admiration and reverence for her mother's genius the one article of faith which admitted neither question nor dispute.

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I have always been sorry for Françoise de Sévigné, though I must admit that my sympathy is grudgingly given. So ungracious and ungraceful is the nature which the mother's letters all unconsciously reveal in the daughter, that all the legends of the girl's beauty bring no conviction to the mind, and in fancy we see her as stiff, conventional and unbending in form and feature as she undoubtedly was in disposition and character. Mme. de Sévigné carries her audience with her on every theme but this—the very one alas! which she had most at heart—the charms and perfections of Françoise.

And yet I am sorry for Françoise nevertheless. A nature like hers avenges its own defects and exacts a penalty in many ways in excess of its ill deserts. If she had been dull, phlegmatic, insensible even she would have suffered less. Her young and dissolute father bequeathed to her a fragile and often suffering body, an extravagant taste and—

perhaps—a defective sense of humour; from her mother she took her keen critical intelligence and a certain rugged indomitable honesty and scorn of shams; while all Mme. de Sévigné's lighter, more delicate and elusive virtues which were graces as well, went shamelessly in a body to the young Charles, the delightful if often unedifying scape-grace-son, who divided so unevenly with Françoise the mental and spiritual heritage of the family.

It was not an easy lot, that of the girl. She was herself and at the same time she was Mme. de Sévigné's daughter. She must move about that little brilliant sarcastic world, by the side of her popular and fascinating mother, knowing (and from a very early period she surely did know or suspect) that she supplied the most effective foil for her mother's vivacious, expansive personality. What wonder then that her inflexible stiffness, her half defiant self-assertion grew more emphatic with the years?

No doubt Mme. de Sévigné herself was somewhat to blame for her daughter's hard precocity. From her earliest years Françoise was a petted, over-indulged child—spoiled by her mother's friends as well as by her mother—to whose good graces a compliment or a favour to her idol was always an open sesame; and if at first both women were persuaded that the affectionate enthusiasm of Mme. de Sévigné's friends was equally warm and sincere in its appreciation of Françoise, the disillusionment that awaited them (never acknowledged by the mother) must have come with a cruel shock to the girl's moody, secretive, suspicious spirit.

For neither de Bussy nor Mme. de Lafayette nor (with one or two exceptions) any of Mme. de Sévigné's intimates seems really to have liked or approved of Françoise.

Child study had not been invented in the seventeenth century, and such minute and respectful attention to children's ways and words would have shocked an age when every effort was bent to ignore and disavow the period between birth and maturity. But again Françoise was different; and from a very early stage we see her later qualities and tendencies already clearly sketched in the portrait of the very little girl. From the first delightful picture, drawn by a contemporary, of the two lovely children seated in the family coach one on each side of their charming young mother, when for the first time after the death of the Marquis, they made the journey up from Brittany to Paris, each successive view we catch of Françoise shows her always the same—a keen, sharp-edged, determined little person, proud, self-conscious, sensitive, whose habital self-restraint was broken sometimes by one of those whirlwinds of anger—amusing enough as related by her mother's gilt-edged pen, but of evil omen surely for the future woman's happiness and credit. Such for example is the anecdote told of stupid Mlle. du Plessis, to whom in the course of a stroll through the gardens at Les Rochers, Françoise administered—in full view of the girl's mother and her own—a resounding box on the ear!—and with no more valid excuse than that she was bored by her companion's affectation and bad manners!

On the other hand nothing that art or effort could accomplish to complete and perfect her natural development was spared by a mother who was not only an excellent judge of education, but herself a product of the very best kind. Literature Françoise did not really love; Mme. de Sévigné reproaches her gently but with manifest sincerity for her indifference to that general reading which furnished so priceless a solace to her mother and brother in their long dreary winters in Brittany. But in the popular philosophy of the time—in Descartes and Jansenius, and the hazy hair-splitting discussions of their schools, Françoise professed a deep and vital interest—admired but not emulated by her mother. Indeed when we peruse Mme. de Sévigné's respectful replies to Mme. de Grignan's learned disquisitions, we are the more resigned to the loss of the much-praised letters themselves; since we too might have been required to pass judgment on "original sin," the "efficacy of Grace," the freedom of the will, and other equally palpitating problems. She soon forgot her very small Latin, but of Italian she had a fair knowledge—probably of Spanish also; and her dancing was as nearly professional as that of a young patrician could decently be. From her fourteenth year, moreover, she had abundant occasion to exploit this as well as her other accomplishments, for she took a prominent part in the fêtes, masques and ballets of the young king's sumptuous court. These were her golden days; court poets celebrated her charms, court chronicles described her dancing, and—a

final climax of her celebrity—it was whispered (not in her mother's hearing we may be sure) that Louis himself was casting covetous glances at her fresh and girlish beauty. A golden moment, but a moment only! The facile admiration excited by her fair face did not deepen into affection or esteem. She had few suitors and those that appeared she did not encourage. Perhaps ambition, perhaps only temperamental coldness held her aloof.

Mme. de Sévigné's maternal enthusiasm meanwhile did not falter, though with the flight of years, she came to look upon this handsome, reserved and difficult daughter as a sort of riddle of the Sphinx —to be read only by the man of destiny for whom they both waited. Five years after the deceptively brilliant débût the mother could still write to the sugary but perfidious Bussy, in response to his two-edged inquiries: "The prettiest girl in France sends you her greetings; that is a fairly good name for her to my mind, and yet I am weary of doing the honours for that same girl all these many years." And a little later, "The prettiest girl in France is more worthy than ever of your esteem and affection. Her destiny is so hard to foretell that I for one give it up."

It was not a romantic destiny, when at last it declared itself. To be the third wife of a middle-aged man, with embarrassed fortune and a family of grown-up children—this was surely but a tame solution of a problem so long canvassed, so eagerly discussed. But the marriage which brought such cruel loneliness and deprivation to the mother,

was not without its fortunate aspects after all. The young Comtesse de Grignan never professed to be in love with her husband—indeed Françoise was no likely subject for that passion which implies, we are told, a sort of spiritual dissolution, a kind of inward disintegration and rebirth, and to such experiences this logical, self-contained, calculating nature was and remained a stranger. But in her intercourse with her husband, nevertheless, Françoise was undoubtedly at her best. The Count was a man of the highest breeding, not of conspicuous talent or even very sound judgment, but a gentleman even in his faults. Throughout their long married life together, they maintained a relation of staunch comradeship and sympathetic co-operation, as also of mutual tact and forbearance, which makes of their union a very pleasant oasis in a generation of Montespans, Lafayettes, Rochefoucaulds and Scarrons.

As a mother again, Mme. de Grignan comes into violent contrast with her own. Were not our minds full of Mme. de Sévigné's maternal devotion, the attitude of Françoise toward her daughters would seem less repulsively cold and judicial. True, little Marie Blanche, her first born, was quite calmly consigned to the cloister at the age of seven and Pauline, the second girl, was rescued from a similar fate largely through Mme. de Sévigné's earnest remonstrance. But then we know that hundreds of children of noble houses and embarrassed fortunes, shared that lot, and after all, in an age so indulgent, when the austerities of convent life were tempered

to the rank and disposition of the inmates, many a destiny was more terrible than that of the nun. The Grignans hoped great things from the military successes and courtly assiduities of their only son—"the little marquis" as his grandmother lovingly calls him, but they realized little save anxiety and expense. The boy bore himself gallantly in his youthful campaigns but displayed no high mental or moral qualities—typical in this of the generation of nobles so sedulously fostered by Louis XIV —men who took their service at court quite as seriously as that of the battlefield. Mme. de Sévigné's efforts to arouse and encourage in Françoise some tenderness and enthusiasm for her children, and especially for the younger girl give us a curious insight into these two so different hearts. "I have nothing new to say about Pauline," she writes, "I love her already from afar; she is pretty as a cherub. Have a good time with her, do! Why be afraid to enjoy oneself with one's children? There are certain kinds of philosophy that are sheer waste and for which one gets no thanks." And again, "Love, oh, love Pauline! Make a few ventures in maternal affection." Words behind which we seem to feel the fall of tears. But, oh! the arid, poverty-stricken nature! the strange unmotherly soul which could call forth such an appeal!

But it is in her relation to her mother that Mme. de Grignan especially challenges our curiosity and interest, and it is here, too, that, joining the ranks of the heretics, I am best able to understand her case and find most to plead in extenuation of

her pitiful inadequacy and failure. For—Sunday School moralists to the contrary notwithstanding, a cold heart is rarely melted by contact with a warm one—nay, rather, a mere indifference and lack of active response is often changed to a positive resistance—an impulse to escape—to elude the pressure—the exacting, absorbing inroads, of a love that gives and demands all. The object of a great but unreturned passion bears a heavy burden and wears inevitably a most unlovely mien. How often must poor Françoise have winced and shuddered in secret as she contemplated her own image in the minds of her mother's friends! Yet after all is it not a proof of this woman's integrity, of the essential soundness of her ill-starred nature, that the years which so commonly confirm and intensify the warps and twists of the natural bent, did really and greatly temper and soften the asperity of her character? The simple unpretending nobleness of her mother's life must have appealed with an ever-growing force to one accessible always through her judgment, rather than through her emotions, while the humiliating collapse of her own and her husband's ambitious schemes, must surely bring into stronger relief the one perfectly unselfish love and service she had known. Yet when at last Mme. de Sévigné died, Françoise had only stiff and stilted phrases wherewith to communicate her loss to her mother's old friends. She had not the gift of tears any more than the gift of laughter. Once more we see her as at the beginning, the victim of a contrast as inevitable as it is essentially unjust. She was too

intelligent, too much a woman of her time not to appreciate her mother's delightful literary and social gifts, yet in her inmost heart she may perhaps have harboured always an obscure sense of injury and wrong: for all time she must be judged—not by the standard of the average good and clever woman, which she was, but by another far higher, more delicate and exacting criterion—the criterion of her mother's unique and incomparable genius and personality.

. . . . . .

After Françoise de Sévigné, Albertine de Staël! Suddenly we pass from the harsh light, the sharp outlines, the crude and glaring colours of a midsummer day, into a region of perpetual twilight. The forms are blurred and faint, a silence falls over the noonday noise, a coolness breathes through the languid air. She was a lovely girl if we may judge by her portraits, with a beauty as delicate, refined and noble as her spirit. No desire of conquest or admiration seems ever to have troubled her devout, even austere ideal of duty, or competed with her thirst for peace, for seclusion, for time and a free heart, to give to her dear ones, to her religion and to that serious and weighty reading and meditation—her taste for which was a direct legacy from her Grandmother Necker. If ever a frail and gentle being was born for the hidden and sheltered life, it was this!

But this release from the world for which even in early youth she was longing, was never to be hers; and such happiness and fruition as came to

her, she must always snatch, as it were, in the midst of alarms. It would seem almost as if the sort of inner dread—the shrinking from life, which she could never overcome or wholly conceal, had been stamped upon her soul at birth—a penalty of the conditions under which she was born and of the well-founded terrors and anxieties of her childish experience. For years she had wandered with her mother, a fugitive through Europe, pursued by Napoleon's tyrannical spite; accompanied now by a more or less equivocal escort, again by servants, while sometimes it was those two alone against the world, and the very real perils to which she was exposed had for Albertine none of the alleviations of the sense of martyrdom or of the inward flame, the constant intellectual excitement which tempered the miseries of exile for Mme. de Staël.

The young girl adored her mother with all the unquestioning loyalty of a neophyte, and all the yearning tenderness of a daughter, and yet, to one who reads between the lines of the younger woman's letters and the scanty records which we have of her life, there is more than a suggestion that, as she grew older, her mother's substantial and ever brightening fame acquired for her nevertheless something equivocal—to be dreaded as well as loved. For in spite of Mme. de Staël's steady and honourable endeavours to protect this childish mind from a premature knowledge of evil, inevitably the girl's conscience and heart were more and more clouded and oppressed by the perception of her mother's anomalous position—of that constant

publicity and controversy which, with or without her own connivance, followed the daughter of Necker, the enemy of Napoleon, the author of *Corinne*—wherever she went.

Ste.-Beuve apparently saw only a sympathetic and appreciative interest in the question once asked him by the young Duchesse de Broglie: "Why, may I ask, are you still so much occupied with my mother?" But perhaps we may be allowed to discern in those mild, and exquisitely modulated accents, a note of discomfort—of a wish that the mother's name might be no more taken in vain—that she who in her life had been the centre and subject of a hundred disputations of tongue and pen, might be suffered at last to rest in that honourable silence—in the daughter's eyes the ideal state for the living as for the dead. These are doubtful and delicate questions, no doubt, but we may at least surmise that in spite of her loyalty, her passionate partisanship, her mother's agitated tempestuous career had left deep in the young girl's soul a secret wound—never acknowledged—never healed; and who knows?—perhaps Albertine would have sacrificed all Mme. de Staël's great renown—her world-wide influence and relations, could she by the same act, have washed her mother's life and name from every moral stain and made of her a blameless wife and mother like herself.

The strain of Puritanic austerity so marked in Mme. Necker had revived in the third generation, in a gentler, sweeter, less aggressive form, without the dross of vanity and egotism. And now, united

to a very humble estimate of her own worth and ability Albertine had that timorous recoil from evil, that shrinking from the world chiefly because of its power to soil and corrupt, which has in all ages driven certain pure spirits to the cloister—or at all events made them incapable of grappling with the ugly facts of life.

Mme. de Staël had often declared in her intense and emphatic way, that "she should force her daughter to make a marriage of inclination." Fortunately the mother's choice for Albertine was so pre-eminently worthy that there could be no need of persuasion or coercion. The union of the young Duke and Duchess de Broglie was complete and satisfying inwardly as it was outwardly brilliant and advantageous from every point of view. But her marriage did not bring to the duchess her release from the world; rather it assured to her for her whole life, the busy, restless, outwardly futile and frivolous existence of a "society woman" and the mistress of a great official salon. Her published letters, many of which date from this period of social and political activity and prominence, reveal a nature of the highest and rarest moral distinction, united to a physical and nervous organization extremely fragile, and shattered probably from her earliest youth; and an intelligence which rises above the mediocre only when her eyes are turned inward upon the scene of her spiritual and emotional life. Her observations upon politics, upon literature, upon the state of the nation, the frivolities and follies of her social world are sound and

reasonable enough, but without special savour in substance or even grace and vivacity in expression. But when the young mother suddenly is called to look upon the ruins of her House of Life, her voice rises to a strain of such simple poignant eloquence as perhaps the great Corinne could scarcely have achieved. When her eldest and best beloved daughter Pauline is snatched from her side at fourteen, Mme. de Broglie finds words to interpret, not only her individual loss but—a very different thing—the sorrows of all spirits as finely tempered as her own.

"A long, long way, sad and serene, opens before me and shall have no end. How strange that word sounds! The greatest sorrows at twenty have not that same finality. There is then in the very violence of our impressions a something that ensures against their duration. But when sorrow comes, hand in hand with order, with calm, with a certain freedom of the spirit, we know we have a guest that has come to abide. And then once more we see all the dreams of childhood and youth, all other hopes, all other delusions, arise and gather round our great sorrow, until the whole group takes on the aspect of some melancholy picture of evening, over which the last rays of the sun are slowly fading into twilight." And again, "It is at our age that the word *irreparable* begins to take on its meaning. To youth it has none, and in old age its significance is lost; but at thirty-five we are face to face with reality. Ah! reality! how it presses in upon us from every side. Not only in the blow that comes to smite us, but

everywhere else as well, we discover that sorrow itself has its limitations; we expect so much from its ministry—for ourselves, for others. A great shock of grief should, we feel, bring so much in its train. And then, when we perceive that it has brought only itself—that around the one great void all things have fallen into their accustomed places, when we have measured what the profoundest emotion can achieve—have weighed the pity of all and know just how far it will go, then there falls upon our souls a sort of despair of all things—an ironical disenchantment that might make us wicked, if the thought of God's infinite compassion and inexhaustible love were not at hand to rescue us."

To this woman, the light of day revealed, as it were, only the obvious; she had little natural affinity for joy or sunshine. But when the night began to fall, black and full of dread, there rose upon her shy and shrinking spirit a gleam of immortal light. In this dim region she moves as one at ease; all her doubts and tremors stilled, she speaks as one having authority and with a firm hand, a sure touch she unlocks the inmost secret of the soul.

In 1832 Monsieur de Broglie's honourable career reached its climax; he became prime minister under Louis Philippe, and to one of her old and intimate friends the Duchess writes of her own part in his success and responsibility:

"I am giving on Monday my first large dinner. What a contrast, dear friend! I am as it were dragged onward by a steam engine—reminded from time to time by a sudden jar of my great sorrow,

but for the most part absorbed by the fear of doing something amiss. My drawing room gives me often the effect of a real desert. Often my eyes are filled with tears, and yet I do not lose my presence of mind. To be thus plunged afresh into the thick of life when the half of me has been torn away!" . . . "I have great need to rest my heart upon a heart that thinks and prays. Believe me, in the midst of my twelve hundred guests at my Saturday *at home,* I am more alone than you in your little chamber." Her friends and her husband's political associates meanwhile, found her unvaryingly attentive, gracious, hospitable; but it cannot be denied that an almost painful atmosphere exhales from the Duchess's letters—a sense of anguish subdued, not overcome; of tastes and feelings suppressed—of a whole being heroically but joylessly laid on the altar of society. Though it behooves us to remember that in France, and with the memory of her mother still fresh in her mind, Albertine de Staël did not undervalue the importance and dignity of that social life, with which, nevertheless, she felt herself so profoundly out of tune. She did not live to be old, but she did live long enough to attain that for which her mother had longed and striven in vain. In a letter to a friend of her girlhood, Mme. de Broglie writes, toward the end of her life: "When I remember all the experiences through which I have tested God's goodness, how He has upheld me in the bitterest trials, by what ways He has led me to a perfect peace—*me* by nature so troubled, so unhappy, so disposed

to create and magnify trouble,—I know not how to express my gratitude to Him. Today I am persuaded that all that has come to me—all my inner conflicts, all my greatest sorrows have helped to lead me to an inward peace."

And upon this note we would gladly let the plaintive voice die away into silence; though the impression left by her letters and the few reminiscences and anecdotes that remain, is, on the whole, less that of peace than of resigned but inveterate melancholy—so fundamental that religion, friendship, domestic affection and prosperity were alike powerless to dispel it. It would seem that of all her famous mother's conspicuous characteristics, one alone had descended in full measure upon this, the best loved and most distinguished of her children; and now, unrelieved by her fervid enthusiasm, her passionate faith in herself and in her inspired mission to mankind—as well as by others of her less exalted and noble qualities—Mme. de Staël's "incurable ennui" held tyrannical sway over a gentler, more sensitive, less brilliant and aggressive spirit to its own fatal loss and hurt.

Neither Françoise de Sévigné nor Albertine de Staël could be counted a very happy woman, and yet to each of them there fell a goodly portion of dignity, honour and success. No question can arise here of shipwreck, moral or material—of ruin and bankruptcy in all that makes life precious—to those at least who do not live by bread alone. We must seek new standards—must choose a new vocabulary even, before we open the record of Solange Dude-

vant, Mme. Clésinger, the only daughter of George Sand. Yet it is not in the gifts of nature that we must look for this disparity. Among these three women, it is in Solange only that a spark of the divine fire smoulders—at least in youth.

When in 1828 Solange Dudevant was born, five years after her brother Maurice, the first great disillusionment had already come to George Sand. The sordid miseries of her married life had brought a rude awakening from the sort of temperamental lethargy of her earlier years, while the great emotional upheaval of the time to come was as yet undreamed of even by herself. Yet we need adopt no questionable theory of prenatal influence to perceive that the birth and early childhood of Solange fell upon most unlucky days. George Sand's Feminism was always strongly individual and took no account of systems; she professed no revolt against the limitations of sex nor the agelong immolation of mothers. But instinctively she was grasping at the whole of life, in her capacious clasp she sought to enfold all joy, all emotion, all experience known to humanity; and however such magnificent aspirations may fall in with advanced modern theories, they have in practice proved hitherto inconsistent with motherhood.

Solange attained her fifth year during George Sand's memorable first winter in Italy and her earth-shaking adventure with de Musset. For the time all saner impulses and feelings were overpowered—all normal interests and duties blotted out, and though after a season reason returned,

and with it, as always, a keen solicitude for her children's well being, yet the mother, with characteristic optimism, seems to have looked to her own direct precepts—always, let us say it to her honour, admirably wholesome, sound, sincere, and practical—to neutralize such failure in her example as might have filtered through to the young girl's ears and understanding. But alas! here she was reckoning without Solange. For Solange incarnated from her earliest years those qualities good and bad, most alien, antipathetic, unintelligible even to her mother's nature and taste.

At that early stage George Sand was a romanticist of the first and only perfectly genuine school. Without hesitation, without struggle—almost without remorse, she threw herself with all her powers into the resistless current of her strong desires. Passion was to her a law—imperative and supreme in proportion to its intensity—a god rather who entering for the time into the heart of a mortal, accomplished ruthlessly his will for good or ill. Her early love affairs were as wholehearted, as disinterested, as free from self consciousness or the sense of shame, as if this great romantic doctrine were indeed a new gospel, and before it all other laws of heaven and earth had been annulled.

But it was an older, already half-disillusioned world upon which Solange opened her eager yet calculating eyes, and even in her childish years this daughter began to question and to read her mother's life like an open book and to judge and appraise her mother's conduct according to her own

standard of values. Far from condemning the temperamental exuberance of George Sand's youth, Solange would appear to have admired it—to have envied its romantic excesses—that tremendous fulness of life and faith and hope which enabled the young author of *Lélia* to move straight and swiftly to her goal in the face of all laws and conventions. Such a youth, such conquests, such loves would have been to Solange an ideal career; and it is only the sober, laborious, *bourgeois* side of the picture and of her mother's nature—never really effaced even in her most tempestuous escapades, that would have seemed prosaic, dull, intolerable to her daughter's luxurious, even somewhat snobbish taste. To float idly in a gondola on the Grand Canal, a lover at her feet, the songs of boatmen and the plash of moonlit waves in her ears—Solange could have done that too with incomparable grace; but the long hours of arduous labour that followed —reaching far into the night—the urgent appeals to publishers in Paris, the unsleeping dread of failing resources, sickness and debt—these were quite inconsistent with Solange's idea of romance. Moreover, however cordial her admiration for her mother might be, it must be conceded that the grounds of it were not such as give weight and sanction to parental counsels, exhortations or reproofs, and, as I have said elsewhere, Fate in her most revengeful mood could scarcely have devised a subtler yet more efficacious punishment for George Sand's faults, than the sort of travesty of her own career, the parody on her own brave fight

for freedom—her revolt against social tyranny, offered by the strange tragi-comedy of her daughter's life.

The story of Solange—her long, stormy, frivolous, most unedifying career—is unhappy and disappointing almost from the beginning. Her wayward childhood—periods of maternal neglect followed by intervals of anxious, careful, too strenuous training at home or at school; her capricious girlhood—where perversity and charm seem for a moment to hold the balance even; her early, inexplicable marriage to one whose unworthiness she seems perfectly to have known and whom she married perhaps quite as much with the object of displeasing and humiliating her mother, as for her own satisfaction—her wretched married life with its continual quarrels, more frequent financial crises—its short intervals of factitious prosperity and notoriety, followed by long stretches of poverty, sordid expedients and an ever accelerating moral *dégringolade*—are they not all written in the many chronicles of George Sand's life and time?

She secured finally her divorce from the dissipated, half-insane Clésinger, and after the death of her only child, pursued—almost unchecked—the futile, irresponsible career of a woman of pleasure, her moral lapses atoned for by no great passion, no noble self-devotion, no disinterested pursuit. And yet she was not wholly lost; her joyless, useless, agitated course is relieved even to the end by one or two green places where the springs of human affection never quite ran dry. Her love

for her mother, alloyed though it was with baser feelings, with selfishness, perversity and spite, was yet sincere and passionate—too passionate, indeed, goading her into inexcusable words and acts—serving perhaps as the main motive of her strange marriage and of the ensuing breach with her family and friends. It was love, but love after her own kind. And of all natures hers was, as I have said, the least fitted to appeal to George Sand, to whom the word *caprice* was unintelligible, and who could write of this same Solange: "This creature whom I have brought into the world—I have nursed her, whipped her, adored her, spoiled and scolded, punished and forgiven and yet—in spite of it all, she has remained to me a stranger."

Once indeed for a season, a very short season, the great gulf was bridged; mother and daughter were one in joy and sorrow, one in hope and in despair. If little Jeanne Clésinger had lived—if the love of both women—if their desperate efforts had availed to save the fragile life and shelter the poor baby from her vicious and half-mad father—perhaps—we cannot tell—Solange's wayward and misguided nature might have righted and steadied itself once for all. But it was not to be. Solange had put weapons into the husband's ruthless hands, and while they were disputing, accusing, kidnapping and rescuing with melodramatic violence, suddenly the case was decided in a higher court. Little Jeanne died in a dreary Paris *pension*, far from both father and mother, and the storms that raged around her cradle were hushed above her

little grave. The mother never forgot. Through all the vicissitudes and adventures of her long life she carried a grief which neither time nor diversion, neither religion nor pleasure, could heal; and on her own grave in the churchyard at Nohant are inscribed by her direction, without title or description of any kind, the words "Solange, mother of Jeanne."

Emotionally always a shallow and barren soil, passionate without tenderness, never quite oblivious of the gallery even in her deepest experiences, Solange yet possessed an intellectual gift that is likely to keep a place for her so long as George Sand is remembered among men. She was dazzlingly, delightfully witty. Her letters have a felicity of touch, an airy grace and lightness that disarm our displeasure even as, in her life-time, they so often turned the edge of her mother's rebukes and drew from her a half-reluctant smile. For the sallies of Solange are often as keen and cruel as they are brilliant and serve to convey her bitterness of spirit, her ironical scorn of herself and of others—in itself half a pose. But hear, for example, this letter to her mother written in her happiest vein. She is describing the violent relapse she has just suffered into her ordinary mood of frivolity and idleness, after a more than usually strenuous effort to emerge from it by an incursion into literature—this time taking the form of an attempted biography of her famous ancestor, Maurice of Saxony.

"I began to understand," she confesses, "that I

was socially lost unless I myself took a hand in resuscitating my lightly won fame as a wit. Accordingly behold me arrayed in my best velvet gown, with clouds of pink and white powder floating around me, as I sally forth to take a turn in Vanity Fair. Through all the week have I dined assiduously, torn my dearest rivals limb from limb; struck dumb all my good little pals, and revived with vigorous fan taps three or four exhausted suitors, who had fallen asleep on my hearthstone between the tongs and the fender! And now, all that ended, behold me once more at home, my gold beads tossed to the topmost shelf along with my high heeled boots, my clever speeches, my mocking cynicism and my wit-on-parade—as false all of them as my brilliant cheeks and my long lashes—at home once more—restored to the love of my heart—to the man of my dreams, the valiant, the handsome Maurice—happy to lavish on him at once my time and affection."

And again this letter, where her satirical wit is not more remarkable than her gift of rapid portraiture, "On Monday," she writes to George Sand, "I met Ernest Feydeau; I can't imagine how Ste.-Beuve should have taken such a fancy to this youth; they are about as much alike as sun and moon. He (Feydeau) is rather good looking, tall, distinguished, pale and dark.— If he speaks, it is of himself, if he is silent you see it is to meditate upon the same subject—to which also he contrives to lead all conversation, applying to himself everything that is said, in the way of praise or commen-

dation of any one, and heaping upon his personal enemies all the vices of Richelieu, Robespierre, or Dionysius the Tyrant. If you chance to observe that you have just read Théophile Gautier's book on Egypt and find it very interesting, he ejaculates, 'Egad, I should think so, I wrote it myself.' Some one in speaking of Chateaubriand hazards an opinion on society, whereupon Feydeau takes the words out of his mouth after this fashion, 'Ah, that is very true what you say, for, as for me'; or 'You are entirely wrong there, for I, etc., etc.' The fellow is a veritable cyclone of egotism, but as for wit,—he has not a trace. What better proof of that could there be than his continual harping on himself?"

She had occasionally a fit of industry, a gust of ambition which carried her fluently through all the preliminary plans and programs of her literary undertakings, even to the verge of their bibliographies—but evaporated infallibly under the strain of the first week's work. A dilettante in all things, she never took herself seriously in any relation, and over words and gestures, feelings and opinions there hangs always a suspicion of unreality which dries our tears, checks our sympathy and in time enables us to understand and in part to share George Sand's—at first—rather disconcerting attitude toward this her only daughter. Her mother had for Solange, besides a purely natural and instinctive affection, a great and troubled solicitude, passing in turn under our very eyes, to a sentiment

compounded of pity, wonder, terror and contempt. How far the great and famous author felt herself responsible for this shipwrecked existence—this warped and perverted career—we cannot tell. Whether conscience ever stung her in her long and honourable maturity and later years, with the insinuation that among all the errors, the pleasant vices of her passionate youth, Solange herself was the worst, the most indestructible, the most fatal by far —this we shall never know. So far as we can tell that high, proud head was never bowed to God or man in the humility of sincere repentance.

Poor Solange! no doubt she hated sermons and cared little to serve her generation either as warning or example. But posterity has pressed her into service nevertheless. The moral George Sand would not heed, we are here to enforce it. The legend from which she averted her eyes is writ large across the page of history.

No, Nature is not unjust or cruel, but she is no spendthrift either, and her reckonings hold over from one generation to another. These three daughters of genius were not happy women; half-unconsciously they dwelt each in the shadow of her famous mother—of the high, imposing personality that went before and shut out from her too much of the light of common day. And that is, after all, the only light by which the uninspired children of men can walk securely, uprightly and in peace.

If Françoise, Albertine and Solange could speak

to us without constraint, there might well come from the depths of each heart—free now from all conventions, proprieties and obligations, the words of the old adage—with a difference—"Happy the daughters whose mothers have no history!"

WOMEN OF FRANCE

LIBERTY, independence, a free field for personal achievement, for individual development and expansion! These are great words, and whoever utters them with the accent of authority is sure of a hearing, at least in western ears. It is the merest truism to affirm that among all the millions of women who would ask, if they spoke sincerely, only the sheltered and restricted life of home, there are —there will always be—a few to whom these watchwords signify the greatest thing in the world—worth living and dying for—precious and salutary for its own sake, irrespective of results. And though we hear nowadays much reactionary doctrine—socialism, collectivism, the supremacy of the State and the subordination of the one to the many, yet the old spirit of individualism is still so strong among us, children of the two Revolutions that we are, we have still so high a value for personality and initiative, that the idea of wasted gifts, of talents stagnating in inaction, is intolerable to our sentiments of justice as to our practical good sense. And, therefore, to the Woman Insurgent, free lance in her sex's evolutionary warfare, we are ready, men as well as women, to cry, well done! Let the smouldering genius burst into flame! Let the wayward inspiration take wings! When David, the slender stripling, strides forth armed only with

his homemade sling and small stones from the brook, to meet the great Goliaths of Prejudice and Convention, all generous spirits are on his side and all join joyfully in the triumphal chorus when he returns bearing the giant's severed head. Never doubt that whenever Madame de Staël, George Sand or Sonia Kovalevsky *does* emerge from the crowd of mediocrities, she will be greeted—*not* by persecution or repression, or even persistent coldness and misunderstanding. On the contrary, so soon as the reality of her gift, her message or her mission is assured (and sometimes even a little prematurely), warm hands of sympathy, encouragement, welcome, are held out to her—especially by him whom, with flagrant injustice, we have heard her professional promoters call her arch-enemy and oppressor—Man.

For, be it said in passing, the autocratic and oppressive male, standing like a sinister angel before the feminist Garden of Paradise wherein dwelleth equality—this formidable apparition is fast fading to a legend. A Teuton he usually was, of course,—when he was not a Turk. In modern times at least he has ceased to flourish in French soil, and, as for chivalrous America, if he ever *did* take root here, we must, I think, have tossed his prerogative overboard along with many other wornout trappings of power, about the time of the "Tea Party" in Boston Harbour.

For literary or controversial uses, we have continued to borrow or adopt him quite freely from England—and in particular from the English fic-

tion of the nineteenth century, where under the patronage of the best society and the most select authors, he really made great havoc among the fair. Rochester, Grandcourt, with the long line of feebler and less convincing St. Elmos and Routledges on this side the sea, attest the vogue of the "*magerfu' man.*" And his success might have lasted longer yet but for the insidious suggestions of farce that are never far away from this imposing figure,—suggestions of which George Meredith took an almost cruel advantage in his merciless portrait of Sir Willoughby Patterne. Yes, the "tyrant man" has had his hour; he will soon be scarcely presentable even as a stage property. And in France, as I have said, he has never really existed as a distinct type; for the French woman's imagination or experience, this bogey of the feminist's over-heated fancy simply isn't "*there at all.*"

The first horrors of the great war burst upon the mind of the western world and found it incredulous or stunned. It found us pursuing each his own "peculiar phantom," engrossed in a hundred small interests and preoccupations that seem, as we look back upon that tremendous hour, without possible excuse, unless, indeed, they do serve to vindicate the sincerity of our shallow optimism, our stupid and short-sighted good faith. So steeped in half-unconscious cant and self-complacency was the average man, that it is still a question how deep and permanent will be the enlarging and liberating effect of these three years of revelation—of undesired contact with reality. Probably he is no more

ready today to look upon the unveiled face of Truth than were the Israelites of old, quaking at the foot of the mount and crying, "If we see God, we shall die."

On every side we used to hear men glibly affirming that a war of any magnitude would now be impossible, if not because the lower strata in all countries would make common cause against it, then surely by reason of the greatness of the commercial interests involved, or even of the sheer dreadfulness of modern engines of death and destruction. In the meantime this civilization of ours was fast rooting out the evils that are the causes of war. With its altruism, its democracy, its loud proclamation of humanitarian ideals, neither Gog nor Magog could long withstand its power. The "drink problem," the "social evil," the desolating extremes of poverty and wealth—already new laws, new associations, new philanthropies were coping with these; while there was a considerable element among our contemporaries to whom it appeared that, so soon as the last crying injustice should be removed from our code, we should become aware of a great beneficent and liberating force set free in a society where the age-old enslavement of Woman had brought about paralysis and sterility in the highest faculties and powers—a force that would hasten the reign of peace and justice on earth.

Alas! Alas! How long ago it seems! And where now upon the ravaged surface of the earth is the last surviving optimist of that bad old school?

Where is he, that he may cover his face with his robe and sit down in ashes and silence with Jonah under his withered gourd? For how shall we mortals, groping and stumbling on our dark way, escape the conclusion, enforced once again by the harsh master, Experience, that under the semblance of progress and perpetual change, this world is ever the same, mankind through all the curves and windings of his boasted upward march toward perfection, always seeking and finding a pretext to fall back upon his lower self, revealing again the primitive creature of appetite and instinct, controlled for a time and in a measure, but not conquered even by the heroic and constantly renewed strivings of a hundred generations!

We learned many lessons in those heart-searching days of 1914. On the one hand there seemed to open before our unbelieving eyes a great abyss of flame and fiery smoke, in the depths of which we caught horrified glimpses of dark beings with bestial instincts and unbridled passions, broken loose upon a helpless, defenceless throng—whose blood yet cries to heaven against a people and a culture which, in claiming to rise above humanity, have fallen below the brutes! But on the other hand, as little by little we came to ourselves, we became aware of other visions that heartened and reassured. Our old world was crumbling beneath our feet, no doubt, the heavens were collapsing upon our heads; yet, in spite of all, the women of our time, concerning whose strength and weakness we had cherished few illusions, were proving them-

selves fundamentally sound, like the men. Yes, she was too often pretentious, petty, selfish, preoccupied with trivial or unworthy aims, or else engrossed in ill-judged and immature schemes and ambitions that too often degenerated into personal grasping after power and notoriety. Nevertheless, it grows truer every day that the women of the great fighting democracies have risen, more or less promptly, to meet the great emergency. Loyal, self-forgetting, patient and brave, if they have not all reached as yet the full measure of their obligations, they have approached it more nearly and more rapidly than their critics, even the most friendly of them, had dared to hope.

But so far as the representative, articulate women of Europe are concerned, the war found them more completely organized, and more deeply divided than ever before, and the rough hand of war proceeded to break up the old lines of cleavage and make new ones. The great body of high-minded and intelligent women in the allied countries, whatever their minor disagreements, realized quickly enough that this was a struggle, far transcending all questions of sex distinction or internal policies, a conflict, in literal fact, of civilized ideals against barbarism, of political and moral freedom against autocracy, of light against darkness. With a fine impulse of surrender they moved to throw aside their private and personal aims, their luxurious leisure and protected seclusion, and offer themselves without reserve to their country's need and the world's. Grievances and grudges against man,

their brother, which had loomed large in the feminist's eyes, were suddenly blotted out by the one central fact—that all these millions of young men were thrusting their youth and strength between the women, the old men and the children, and a foe that knew neither law nor justice nor mercy.

To all these women, therefore,—doctors, nurses, Red Cross workers, munition makers—substitutes for men in a hundred fields, it has seemed that *their* way of self-affirmation must be simply the way of the best service, the quickest and quietest efficiency. When their strained eyes and over-burdened hearts turn to rest a moment on the unknown "After the War," it is with neither fear nor triumph, only a boundless sense of lamentation and mourning and woe—of a world made grey and poor and empty by the passing of all this beautiful youth—the drying up of humanity's spring of life and love and laughter for generations to come!

But at the beginning of the war, and for many months thereafter, there were other feminine voices in the air, among the belligerents as in neutral countries; and to make themselves heard above the roar of the cannon, they were forced to be a little strident—to rise sometimes almost to a scream. And here were to be found many of the accredited leaders of their sex—famous names in the annals of pacifism, extreme socialism and anarchy; many women of many creeds joined in this inharmonious chorus—only, be it observed, *not* the down-trodden or oppressed; these were the apostles and leaders, the officers of the revolting army who (for good

reasons no doubt) did not sit down to meat with the rank and file. Perhaps their numbers were always relatively small, but the old earth, tortured and travailing in pain almost beyond endurance, seemed alive with these women. Their fiery eloquence, their utopian schemes, their aggressive gestures, sometimes even their wanton acts, seemed for a moment, especially in England, to darken the horizon and portend some strange upheaval, some unnatural strife.

But again, war was the touchstone that put these women to the test. The sifting and winnowing of the hearts of men, brought about by a great world-crisis—how could the mothers and wives of men hope to escape it? For the thoroughgoing feminist, the "standpatter," may try to consolidate all her forces into one camp—armed at all points against the enemy man—infallibly the breach is made from within—in the Amazonian ranks themselves; who after all were human and women before they were feminists, and loudly as they claim equality and demand equal tasks, for equal rewards, must yet recognize that in the last analysis there is one service that men and men only can perform, and that now when men are pouring out their blood like water, it is an evil hour to bicker about wages —an hour rather to give all without money and without price.

In a word, most of the Feminists, and of the militants in particular, have disarmed—since the childish perversity of those determined martyrs, the White House picketers, seems scarcely

worthy to be dignified into militancy—they have disarmed for the duration of the war. And let us do them the justice to add that they have apparently not counted the cost, trusting (as many believe they might have trusted earlier and always) that men's generosity and justice will not suffer them to labour in vain. And after the war—ah, after the war! who shall say that the goals we once pursued so eagerly will then seem entirely worth while!

For myself, I do not question that the woman's rights will soon all be hers—probably before the more conservative among them are ready to take up the additional burdens. Not only at the polls will they enforce their will; from time to time their voices will be heard on the floors of Parliaments and Congresses. Their lighter tones will vibrate oftener in dusty law courts and political meetings; their eyes shall look out from behind the Judge's learned spectacles, their hands guide the Doctor's rushing runabout, as well as collect fares and turn the wheel in humble trolley car and omnibus. Whether they shall attain at last what their most advanced theorists demand—"free" or "state-subsidized" motherhood, will depend less, I think, upon the general progress of "equality," than upon the standards of morals and manners as well as the ideals of marriage, prevailing in the various countries where they live. Perhaps it is safe to affirm that *some* women are not more immune to "prejudice" than *some* men, and at least in western countries the emancipated mother may wait several generations before attaining her true heroic stature.

But we shall surely test the results of the woman's full participation in public affairs.

We can scarcely expect, however, on the other hand, though we may hope and desire it, that in the future women will write more (or better) books, paint more pictures, compose more music, or enrich the world with more inventions and discoveries in the kingdom of science, than she has done hitherto. Genius rarely waits upon opportunity, and, besides, for several centuries the special gifts and talents of women have been not only free, but eagerly fostered and promoted by distinguished men. We have even some records of mediocre feminine endowments exaggerated, overpraised and overestimated by too zealous masculine patrons to the point of premature exhaustion. Angelica Kaufman, Sir Joshua's pupil and protégé; Fanny Burney, the spoiled pet of Johnson's circle; and, in a different sphere, little Jacqueline Pascal, most touching of "infant phenomena," all favourites of great men in their youth, only to dwindle rather drearily into respectable mediocrity at the end.

But in the counting house and on the stock exchange we shall find some women as time goes on; though whether their capacity for amassing and conserving the fortunes they have hitherto so gracefully dispensed will ever become a conspicuous feminine talent, whether a gift for high finance will figure largely among their evidences of equality—identity rather—with men—this is a perfectly open question. Success in business on a small scale, as in art, in literature, in science, has long been theirs.

If their will be firm, their nerve steady, their imagination bold enough to lift them to the seats of the mighty among the captains of Industry, there, too, they will be made welcome and at home.

The question of the future will be no longer how much shall the women be permitted to do, for all artificial barriers will have been withdrawn; but rather, first, how far will her own strength of body and mind be likely to carry her in the open road of competition with men on their own ground; and then, and more important still: among the many and diverse tasks and objects proposed to mankind in the great and laborious future, which shall seem most worthy of the woman's choice and pursuit? She *may* do what she chooses, but what will she choose to do?

In a little while the shouting and the tumult will begin to wane and the hour approach when the still small voice of prophecy, warning or advice will have a chance to penetrate the women's ears—emancipated already from their shadowy bonds, or soon to feel the liberating stroke. What better can we do who love them and would have them choose aright, than direct their eyes to a civilization which has been conspicuously successful in its dealings with their sex, a people which has thought more, and more philosophically, about women than any other, whose lighter hand with its more delicate, sympathetic and persuasive touch, has, it would appear, drawn from the woman's nature and genius their richest, most characteristic and abundant fruit? Now at least few will deny to France

her claim to be the world's best teacher in all the higher and subtler lessons of civilized life. Hers is now more than ever the wisdom that is born of suffering—of many and bitter disillusionments, of a keen sense of mortal frailty blended with an inalienable interest in all things human—a tolerance and detachment which only self-knowledge and experience broad and deep can give.

On the threshold of our inquiry, we are met by the words of a famous Frenchman, who is also a famous feminist: "What I call Feminism," says Emile Faguet, "is a wholesome and excellent insurrection of woman—not against man, but against herself—against her own faults, the faults to which she is naturally addicted, and which men by a certain more or less deliberate calculation have for centuries fostered, cultivated, and developed in her nature."

A la bonne heure! It is well said, indeed. Of such Feminism are we all preachers and partisans —all at least who are not despisers of their kind. If we could accept M. Faguet as the true standard-bearer of Feminism, discussion and controversy would rapidly die out and all enlightened citizens take up arms under his banner to march to world-wide victory. But unluckily these are by no means the official tenets of the feminist, as I have read them. *Their* leaders are far more concerned with the faults of society as represented by *man* than with their own. *Their* image of woman is rather that of the victim and martyr than of the self-con-

victed, self-reforming penitent, striving to rise to the level of greater privilege.

And so, not forgetting M. Faguet's words as voicing the highest ideals for women of the race that has known and loved them best, let us look for a little while at the present situation and mental attitude of Frenchwomen toward a question that may be supposed to touch them more closely than it can touch even the broadest-minded of men. Considering the past as well as the present, seeking even to guess at the future, let us ask how far her interest in the new doctrine and movement, her supposed discontent with her present lot, or her ambition for a larger share of power and influence in the future, are likely to draw her from the habits, tastes, traditions, formed in the course of her long history.

For those of us who acquiesce in change and innovation—not because we like them, but only for the sake of righting intolerable wrongs, of sharing our privileges with the disinherited of the earth, there is a definite reassurance in the Frenchwoman's character and history. Whatever new rights and prerogatives war and its aftermath may add to her dowry, she is not likely, I believe, to change in any sudden or spectacular manner or degree. She may be called upon to cast her vote in the elections of the House of Deputies, she may acquire, by M. Faguet's earnest advice and her own growing sense of the seriousness of life, the very useful habit of learning in youth some art or occupation to fall

back upon in case of emergency. But the ideals of her daily living—as aristocrat, *bourgeoise* or working woman—are not likely to be violently upheaved, or even radically modified, except by the slow processes of time. And the simple and sufficient reason is that the average Frenchwoman likes her own life as it is. In strong contrast to the insurgent Englishwoman, Scandinavian or Russian, she is aware that her position in the social scheme is one of pervasive, unobtrusive dignity and importance. Her life is interesting, however petty and monotonous its daily round may appear to the onlooker, she respects her work and finds in the promotion of her modest ambitions enough of incentive and stimulus. She would probably admit without a blush that she found it hard, even in imagination, to detach her own destiny and fortunes from those of her family.

Wrongs she has had, and still has, no doubt,—but where is the woman (or for that matter the man) who has not? The life of the women in the lower middle class is hard and narrow, with few material comforts, few outside interests, and far less intimate participation in the men's affairs and pursuits than exists in the working classes, properly so-called. But the humbler Frenchwoman of the rank and file, along with some undeniable handicaps, has one great advantage over her peers among richer and more easy-going peoples—her frugal and industrious habits, the moderation of her hopes and demands, her strong sense of family unity and

solidarity make her a most efficient helpmate in the economic struggle. She bears with the man the burden and heat of his laborious day, and when by industry and ability he rises, she rises with him; her innate intelligence and humour, her tact, intuition and instinctive good taste, making her, with all her simplicity and lack of pretension, completely at ease with the practised woman of the world. The head, heart and hands of the typical Frenchwoman are thoroughly enlisted, and if the cruel epithet of *parasite* ever falls upon her ears, she is far indeed from suspecting any application to herself.

We hear less now than we once heard in dispraise of the French ideas of marriage. For one thing, our increasing acquaintance with France and the French people, quite as much as their wonderful spirit throughout this war, has assured us of the fundamental moral health of the race—of their private, as well as of their public virtue. And then, our own broadening and lengthening experience as a nation has suggested to more thoughtful minds that some of our much prized and vaunted privileges—our theory of romantic love, for example, and of unrestricted and undirected freedom of choice in marriage, have not proved so generally and completely successful in their workings in America, as to justify great severity in our judgment of others, who have chosen to abide by older customs. The perils and abuses to which our ways lie exposed are perhaps as great as those more

frankly admitted and guarded against by less optimistic—perhaps I may even say, more worldly-wise, social arbiters.

Certainly no people effete, decadent—tottering to its fall from sheer spiritual and physical decrepitude—could have risen, without warning, at a word, and as one man, to such heights of endurance—of simple, silent, uncomplaining and unrelaxing resistance to aggression—as have distinguished the French during these three and a half terrible, splendid years.

And, of course, the Frenchwoman's attitude toward the invasion of her country has allotted to her a full share of both heroism and suffering; yet her response to both calls is so quiet and so free from emphasis or rhetoric, that even now, after so long a time, we hear far more of the sacrifices and achievements of the Englishwoman, the Belgian, the Russian, even of our own American volunteers, than of hers who from the first has borne the heaviest load.

Behind the millions in the trenches, on the French frontier, fighting, falling, freezing, scorching; suffering in turn every physical ill our human flesh is heir to, there are the mothers, wives, sweethearts and sisters on whose letters and all-pervading affection and remembrance these men's hearts are kept alive, with a literalness of interpretation hard to exaggerate. Reaching him at long and irregular intervals, but looked for as the very wine of life, these letters bring a hundred homely details of house and farm and shop where she is taking his

place, and doing to the limit of her slender strength, *his* work; and besides these tangible reassurances, there is the unfailing flow of love from faithful, tender hearts, hearts that miss him, look for him—to whom he represents all the joy and the beauty of the world. Always in the background, but like his boon companion Death, she is never far off, and the *poilu* looks to her, not as a subject or inferior creature, still less as an expensive toy, but as a precious, indispensable though *different* part of himself.

If the individualistic aspirations of the Anglo-Saxon, the craving of the advanced feminists in England and America, to work out an independent solution of the problem of sex relations—if these strange ambitions ever found a response in the Frenchwoman's heart, she must be deaf and blind and dumb to them now. She has always been needed—she is needed a hundredfold more now than before. Male and Female created He them has been accepted by the Latin mind as a Divine idea, absolute, irrevocable, and, on the whole, the greatest alleviation for the fearful solitude of the spirit that even a Divine mind could conceive. If we add to this the Latin's somewhat larger dose of sensuality, more euphemistically called *temperament*, and the franker admission of this, as a force to be reckoned with in human affairs, we may find it easier to explain the readiness of the French—women quite as much as men—to throw in their lot together, and in spite sometimes of conflicting interests, of warring impulses, to accept life in com-

mon as after all the best to be attained. Machine-made schemes of quick reform, based on the self-sufficiency and independence of women, meet at first a look of incredulous surprise, changing slowly to the Mona Lisa smile of old wisdom, the subtle incommunicable lore, won through long ages of social experience, of knowledge of the human heart, and of the world. They have not our young scorn of compromise—these Latins. Something less than the Earthly Paradise certainly, is offered by the present régime at its best; but far, *far* better than the co-operative-apartment-house-and-promiscuous-nursery-and-kitchen ideal that obsesses the feminist's imagination.

O no! We are making no exaggerated claim for the French character nor for their civilization and social ideals. They have originated no new conception of woman, no lofty theory of her place and position in the social order. But we must not forget that when, in the sixteenth century, Western Europe began to emerge from the feudal period, France was already at least a century ahead of her neighbours. Her monarchy through a combination of circumstances, fortunate on the whole, was more centralized, her nobility and middle classes wealthier, better educated, more secure and influential, and for these reasons, social life and interests had made a long stride forward, and a rapid improvement in the position of women was one of the direct results. The chief apologists of Feminism, we know, exhort us to look to the incomparable Cave Woman as the embodiment of the highest ideals of

the sex, since the primitive simplicity of living and its besetting perils had then reduced to a minimum the distinctions between the woman and the man. But all that is a long time ago. The evidence lacks definiteness and detail. For the present, we may be excused if we draw our conclusions from the records of later if more degenerate days. In modern times, at least, that complex, elaborate and largely artificial organism called *society* has always conceded to woman a titular primacy and leadership. And in France, as early as the sixteenth century, as heads and founders of powerful religious orders, as great ladies, wives and mothers of nobles and presiding over large and complicated households, even as royal and princely mistresses, they began to exert an influence unparalleled at any other epoch, ancient or modern. The moral quality of this influence was various—noble or debasing in direct ratio with the character of the women, and the men, involved.

There was every moral shade and grade to be found among these women, from Jeanne D'Arc and Marguerite of Navarre to Catherine de Medici and Madame de Pompadour. The point to be noted is that in a country where a Salic law rigidly excluded women from the throne, for three centuries the power and influence of women have been accepted, recognized, utilized, and that this situation has existed, so far as history records, nowhere else. In England, oddly enough, women might, and frequently did wear the crown and govern the nation with marked ability and prestige, yet perhaps no

fact is more conspicuous in English social history, than that consideration for woman, deference to her nature and her needs, have played the smallest part in the evolution of the nation.

Not less significant is it, I think, that, even in France, the most distinguished and highly gifted women were chary always of exerting their influence directly on politics,—Madame de Staël herself being an exception rather apparent than real. Intuitively they chose to avoid identification with such equivocal and transitory things as party programs. They have contributed to great moral issues and public causes chiefly that atmosphere of warm sympathy and disinterested enthusiasm in which (especially in Latin countries) great impulses toward moral and social amelioration and reform grow ripe for action. And remembering the usual course of human events and the small space for gratitude reserved in the heart of man, it is gratifying to observe how sincere and generous have been the recognition and acknowledgment accorded these women by the society they served. No better measure could be found of the solidity of their achievements than the tribute paid them (often years after they were dead) by the friends who did not forget and who happened also to be the men whose lips gave the law to European thought.

And the Frenchwomen of the present, descendants of a long and glorious line, born into a rich tradition of social life and manners, have much to lose, little to gain, it would appear by a "sex revolution." The feministic agitator comes with her

seductive offers of the franchise, a seat in municipal councils—perhaps in the House of Deputies itself, her own place and wages in the workshop, her own pipe and glass in the *cabaret*—in short, a self-respecting, self-supporting (if solitary) independence, and need not be surprised to find her French audience critical and cool.

Can we not imagine an intelligent and cultivated woman of the "haute bourgeoisie" or upper middle class, urged to cast in her lot with the English militants in the great days of militancy, just before the war? And do we not, in fancy, hear her respond somewhat on this fashion?

"Power, influence, independence! Why, I have more of the first two already than I can use, and of the third I have never learned to feel the need. To administer the affairs of my household in the systematic and thrifty manner expected of a woman of my class and tradition, with few servants and those imperfectly trained, exacts a substantial part of my day, but a part fully justified by its results, from my family's point of view and my own. Then my daughter must be trained to be a not less efficient *ménagère* than her mother, in that home of her own which she frankly and confidently expects. I must have leisure to take an intelligent and sympathetic interest in the pursuits, business, ambitions of my husband and son, and, with their co-operation, to maintain the family credit in our well-defined social sphere, as well as meet suitably the demands of charitable and philanthropic enterprises. And if you add to this a certain amount of

reading (not entirely frivolous, by any means), some share in the intellectual, or artistic life, lived so intensely by my countrymen, then let me assure you that when I go to rest late and weary, I sleep the sleep of the just, with no qualm of self-reproach, because forsooth I have not earned the money I have spent!

"To Frenchwomen of my sort, as you know, marriage is—not a romantic adventure in which the man and the woman, the boy and the girl, bear the full burden of the choice and its momentous results; an adventure, after all, begun in illusions and conventions, often noble and poetic no doubt, sometimes also a cloak for self-deception and hypocrisy. No, marriage is with us a soberer, less ecstatic affair; a partnership, rather, entered into with the consent of bride and groom, but only after reflection and discussion, and by the advice and the substantial assistance and furtherance of the families of both. Among people of character and breeding this relation does by no means signify a helpless and abject self-surrender on one side and an irresponsible mastery on the other, but as the advantages of the marriage are frankly understood to be mutual, so are the obligations entailed—reciprocal respect, consideration, concessions, and an unfailing courtesy—greater perhaps than when more youthful passion and unreason go to the forming of it. And if to all these things a sincere and deep affection can be added, then we have—a rare thing in France, but no rarer, I think, than elsewhere—a happy and successful marriage, and our

children, rich or poor, gentle or simple, are born into a goodly heritage.

"As for what you scornfully call the 'economic dependence' of the unemancipated woman, my dowry, that wise provision of the forefathers, secures me against any such galling situation. My side of the house makes deliberately this contribution to the founding of the new family, and its effect upon my dignity and security are among its important results. And after all, why should I seek detachment, a separate gainful occupation which would take me away from my home just when the children are growing into maturity, and, in the higher things, are needing me most? If my salary or wages be not imperatively needed for the family support, how should the addition of it to our income compensate for my absence during the working hours of the day, my interests divided from those of my husband, my energy and spirits drained, just when these beings whom I love best and for whose welfare I am responsible, have most to gain from my oneness with them in heart and life?

"And then consider one special condition which, I am told, exists only in France. This position of mine which I prize so highly—in my household and among my friends and connections—grows stronger and more honourable, with the passing years. My influence is not (as I hear is the case in America) a question of bright eyes, lustrous hair and charming gowns. I do not reach my full measure of prestige till my words are heard with

deference and heeded with scrupulous obedience, by a third generation. It is as a grandmother that I come into full possession of my prerogative as head of the family—not much later, by the way, than the time when, my English friends tell me, the Dowager lady of the Manor is informed, with more or less polite circumlocution, that her days in the old home should be numbered—that she and such unmarried daughters as remain are now expected to crowd themselves into a modest cottage somewhere on the estate to make room for the young lord —their son and brother—and his bride.

"Naturally we Frenchwomen, especially while we are young, love pleasure, crave luxury and diversion, and we might often be disposed to envy the rich and independent American woman her brilliant and expensive career. Only from her own lips issues a warning one dare not neglect. She is telling me every year with increasing emphasis, that her life, too, is less satisfactory than it seems. True she has reduced the old-fashioned duties and obligations to a minimum; her life seems full of rights and privileges for which she gives little in return. But if her days are spent in wandering over the surface of the globe, a cold, shining, meteoric apparition, she frankly admits that it is because she has failed to strike root at home. I take her own word for it—repeated a hundred times in books of her writing—her freedom is illusory, her wealth is oftenest counted in apples of Sodom, her husband and children have learned to dispense with

her society and her affection and have emancipated themselves from her influence. Her costly charities and philanthropic hobbies are many times but so many devices for filling an empty heart and empty days.

"Besides, there is another point of view. The elements of justice and reason in your feministic propaganda might indeed appeal to my sympathy; but there are certain articles of your creed and your practice which I could never make my own. I am not a *diplômée* of the Sorbonne, but a sense of humour and a sense of logic are the birthright of the daughters of Montaigne and of Molière. Can you make clear to me the sequence in reason between broken shopwindows in Piccadilly and votes for women in the House of Commons? Or how shall you reconcile my perhaps too frivolous and beauty-loving spirit with the assault upon the Velasquez Venus in the National Gallery, regarded as a political measure and designed to secure for the assailants admission to the English Bench and Bar? Verily between my thought processes and yours there is still a great gulf fixed!"

Somewhat on this fashion might a thoughtful French matron have defended herself and explained her preference for her own lot in those days, so long ago, before the War!

And if she spoke and felt thus in a time of peace and prosperity, with what passionate intensity will she cling to and cherish those old household gods now! The period of renovation and reform which

inevitably will follow the war and in which Frenchwomen's hands and brains will have their full share, will be accomplished, I believe, not in any revolutionary spirit, but rather with due reverence for that old France hallowed for ever by the millions of graves—of husbands, brothers, sons, who died for her.

For there is one gift of the Frenchwoman which we have only now begun to know and to prize—her incomparable genius for motherhood. Nay, do not deride, you who have so often reproached her and her country for their persistent limitation of families! Remember that it is not only in numbers that we count. Motherhood may be intensive, may be cultivated as an art, and here the French woman has no rival. That tact and delicacy of touch, the intuitive understanding of the hearts of men, which have made her for centuries past-mistress in the social world—she uses them all in her relations with her son. Long after the English or American youth has shaken off his mother's hand, even before his emergence into an independent man's life, the influence of the French mother, in changing its form, has but gathered tenacity, subtlety, strength. The son's attitude toward her takes on I know not what of chivalrous deference, of protecting tenderness. There is no further question between them of authority or obedience, but only a profound sympathy, complete understanding, congenial companionship that have, with individual exceptions, of course, no parallel in any other country.

Read over, if you will, the collections of letters passing from the trenches in France and Flanders to homes in England or France—to say nothing of those destined to German households. The English soldier confides his thoughts and feelings, so far as his temperamental reserve will permit, to his father, his friend, his wife, or his sweetheart, more readily perhaps than to his mother from whom his manhood has, in a sense, set him apart. The Frenchman in his most intimate self-revelations, his most searching questionings of Fate, his musing over the mystery of life and death—turns instinctively to this one friend, his accustomed confidante in the past, as well as the one most needing to draw fortitude and consolation from him, the only one sure always *to understand*, from the cradle—far too near so many of these young creatures, on the one hand—even to the brink of the grave, beside which, so to speak, he sits as he writes.

No, do not rashly offer the Frenchwoman any substitute for this the very core of her heart! In the work of rebuilding and reinvigorating the shattered life of her country, she will do her part bravely and well. But no political rights and privileges, no independent existence or activities will compensate the mothers for their loss. This generation, at least, will go mourning all their days for the young hands, young brains, young hearts, all dead that France might live; and that by her example and with her leadership, the ancient struggle of humanity against the Beast, of the spirit

against the flesh, might endure and at the last, a clearer vision, a nobler purpose, a fairer ideal, might flourish and prevail under a New Heaven in a New Earth.

THE END

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